Abrupted Tales

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Abrupted Tales

by Sanguineheroine

Summary

Will and Hannibal's secrets are revealed to Alana through Hannibal's letters to Will from behind the walls of the BSHCI.

Will leaves his present behind to pick through the scattered wreckage of their past and find the key to their future.

Or, a Twitter prompt that grew dramatic legs and a plot .

Canon divergent from season two.

Notes

Title is from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* by Anne Bradstreet.

Chapter 1

The first thing Alana notices is the texture of the paper. Milky-white and almost as heavy as cardboard, as smooth as silk against her fingertips. It makes Alana think of Margot's skin under her summer nightgowns and she realises that the envelope is made from cotton fibre. Nothing like the rippling, gold-edged monstrosities in which he used to send beautifully-inked dinner invitations but without ink, what good was that paper?

This is old-fashioned, almost primitive, a perfect choice for a man reduced to writing with a lead pencil. Other patients' letters, she reflects, look like the work of grade-schoolers; smudged pencil on cheap lined paper. Undignified, pedestrian accounts of meals and therapy sessions, old memories given away to loved ones for safe-keeping. This one, she knows, with its crisply lettered sender address

Dr H Lecter
Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane
Baltimore City, Maryland

will be nothing of the sort.

Humming, Alana flips the envelope over with one hand and picks up her pen - power, shaped into an ordinary silver rollerball with her married initials engraved discreetly on the clip - with the other, ready to record the recipient's name for Hannibal's mailing record. At the sight of the addressee she stops humming and places the letter carefully down on the blotter as if it might bite.

Alana dials Jack's number from memory and drums her nails anxiously against the edge of her desk while she waits for the connection.

"Crawford" the familiar growl comes down the phone.

"Jack," she says cooly, struggling not to betray the wild beating of her heart, "it's Alana."

"Alana!" he says brightly, his growl lightening into a pleasant basso, "It's been too long. How's Margot? What about that boy of yours?"

Alana tamps down her guilt over declined invitations and her worry for Will and tries to smile enough so that Jack will hear it, "They're fine Jack. They're actually in Australia right now with one of Margo's fillies."

"Really? That's terrific! Listen I-"

"Jack," Alana cuts him off, "I, uh, I have a letter here, Hannibal's outgoing," she hears Jack's question in the ringing silence of the line "he's writing to Will."

"Well," Jack growls, "that's a hell of a thing. Did he write? Will, I mean. I'm sure Doctor Lecter wasn't invited to the wedding."

“No-o,” Alana says slowly, the realisation and horror rising together in an ugly dawn of an idea, “but he knows that I was and if I know one thing about Hannibal, I know that he doesn’t like to share his toys. This is a cry for attention; either a very elegant threat or-” she breaks off, examining the tender urge that rises in her to keep Hannibal’s secrets. It happens more often now that she is a mother; she’s not soft, not anymore, but she feels the tiring pull to protect those in her care.

“or...” Jack continues “a confession? It’s a bit late for that. He must know that Will knows it all already.”

“No, not a confession.” Alana sighs heavily, “a love letter.”

“Well,” Jack says again in poorly-concealed surprise, “you be sure to let me know, Doctor Bloom, if you find anything,” he hums, then continues with exaggerated delicacy “actionable.”

“Of course, Jack,” Alana says cooly, her professional persona snapping back into place with a sting that she is sure Jack can feel, “I’ll be sure to let you know”. She hangs up without waiting for his reply.

Alana sits for a moment, regarding the envelope with narrowed eyes. She walks to the bookshelf and pours a drink from the decanter, a gift from Margot when Alana accepted this job; *working there, love, you’ll need a drink to hand* she’d said with a sad smile.

Kicking off her shoes, Alana scoops up the letter and takes it, and her drink, to the chaise. She sits cross-legged, back propped against the cushion, and lifts the letter, pulling free a thick fold of paper from it and setting the expensive-looking envelope aside before settling in to read.

My Dearest Will

Alana has told me your happy news. I hope this letter finds you as you deserve; in the fullest flush of connubial bliss.

Marriage after a short courtship is an ideal arrangement, physiologically speaking. Regular sexual release during the ardent ‘honeymoon’ period of an intimate relationship stimulates Oxytocin production. Did you know that Oxytocin and Vasopressin, both present in increased amounts during and after sexual intimacy, have been linked directly to monogamous pair-bonding in Prairie Voles?

Alana remembers the smell of sweet wine and cigars, cello music and sheets the colour of the ocean under moonlight. Kisses as warm and sweet and sorrowful as being welcomed back to your childhood home to mend a broken heart. Warm skin against her back and thighs. Pair bonding.

It was simple in the beginning to tell herself that Hannibal didn’t love her because he couldn’t. He was broken, ill-made, incapable. It hurt her all over again, deeply and sharply and unexpectedly to understand that he could love, *did* love, and that his manipulation of her

was no more than the common dishonesty of a faithless lover pining for someone else's heart and striking out to hurt them.

What intimacy, Alana wondered, had bonded Hannibal to Will?

The next page was a pencil sketch, cunningly realistic and lovingly rendered, a thousand tiny details leaping to life from the paper.

It was Will with lips and teeth parted in laughter, and luminous in a way that she had never seen in life. His eyes were creased just slightly at the edges and sparkled with tender amusement. His jaw was relaxed and his shoulders loose with no trace of his familiar tension or pain. His shirt was unbuttoned and his cheeks were flushed. He was happy.

Was this a memory? A memory of shared happiness, hoarded jealously against the pain of inevitable rejection? Or was it simply the dream of a man whose future had been locked up behind glass and steel and rough grey cotton?

Oxytocin is thought to enhance the quality of memories. Do you think that it might be true? Do you believe that my memories of you in the grip of pleasure burn more brightly than those memories of you before, or after? I fervently believe it must be so.

In the perpetual grey twilight of this place, my memories of you, Dearest Will, are a sensory oasis. It is relatively simple, as bland as the food is here, to bring to mind instead the lingering taste of apples in your mouth when I first kissed you by your stream or the salt of your seed on my fingers, caught on my tongue before it could be wasted on the sandy soil of the bank there.

For every tryst we shared, a version of you lives in my memory palace, bright and undying. Your cries; your moans; your whispers; echo down the corridors. The smell of your skin lingers in my nose and on my fingertips when I emerge into the grey limbo of my reality. I awake from those memories hard and aching, drowning in you.

It appears that you, my darling, do not suffer in kind. You would bury the memory of me under a waterfall of Oxytocin shared with your new wife, making bright new memories. I have no such luxury. Even if I were freed from these walls, there is no love in this life or the next that could free me from you.

I can, however, return to you the Wills I have hoarded in my mind. I shall send them one at a time, neatly folded letters that you may burn and forget, or share with your bride as you wish. They will be my final gift to you.

Always,

Hannibal

There was a tightness in Alana's chest that spoke of breath held too long. She let it out with a long sigh, closing her eyes. Her hands shook as she placed the letter in the envelope and when she stood, she felt the specter of arousal in the heaviness of her belly and thighs. She sealed the envelope quickly and dropped it in the outgoing mail slot, eager to be rid of it.

She didn't call Jack.

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It is a week before the next letter arrives, folded neatly into another thick, white envelope. A faint perfume of paper and pencil and soap arises when Alana unfolds the paper and it surrounds her as she reads, a ghostly echo of the author hovering at her shoulder. She imagines breath tickling her ear; the warmth of a whisper.

My Dearest Will

I often wonder what happened to my garden. I don't imagine that Uncle Jack is keen to expedite the disposal of my property and put any potential evidence beyond his reach, but neither do I think that he has been tending my herbs or my roses. I see him in my dreams, tearing down the walls of my home, digging up my secrets and leaving old blood and melted snow on the rugs.

I have never seen the garden in Baltimore fallow; I think it might be rather beautiful, though I do hope that someone might one day again coax it to bloom.

You bloomed in that garden, my darling boy, ripe and ready and delicious. That Will, the first in my collection, lives in perpetual déshabillé, flushed and undone, lying leonine upon the grass in the garden of my memory palace.

Do you remember that day?

We were cooking brunch: truffled poached eggs and fresh fruit and home-cured bacon. You insisted that we could not possibly be having brunch unless we were drinking mimosas, and you, you little beast, mixed them using vintage Bollinger.

You were so delightfully self-conscious of the juxtaposition of your attire and the crystal champagne flute that I took off my cufflinks and rolled up my sleeves, to even the playing field, as it were. The hunger in your eyes made me quite breathless, and utterly uninterested in our meal.

You were already erect when you stood behind me and laid your fingers over mine on the knife handle as I sliced the bacon. I could feel the pressure of your hand guiding mine and, although it pains me to admit it, I confess that I almost embarrassed myself in a way I have not since I was a very young man. With a single scrape of your jaw against my jugular vein, you vanished back to your station and resumed slicing fruit. You looked at me, into me, and there was pomegranate juice like blood on your lips. I still do not know what tempted you more; my body, or the blade.

We ate in the dining room. When you lifted your head from your plate, there was an image of the sun reflected in your eyes. They were so blue and clear and cloudless it was like looking into a summer sky and I had the strangest feeling that like that sun, looking straight into you for too long might leave me blinded. And didn't it, after all?

My plate was not empty, but when presented with the decision between nourishment or your outstretched hand there was no question. You led me through the french doors into the garden and into the sunlight, into your arms. Your face was flushed, you were smiling that wicked private smile (you told me that it had only ever been for me, but I suppose our current situation does undermine the veracity of your promise) that never failed to arouse me, and when you at last kissed me I could taste (rather expensive, thank you) champagne on your tongue.

You pushed me down under the ornamental plum tree, rough kisses and curses covering my lips as you ground against me. I must have felt your body like that against mine a hundred times but it is that first time I most treasure; quivering against me with a heady mix of arousal and uncertainty and my body aching to feel you closer, hotter, more. You certainly gave me more*, darling boy.*

You gave me your cry when I sucked down that full and delightful mouthful of hard, heated, flesh. You gave me a guttural moan like that of a dying man (a sound with which I am intimately familiar) and my name spoken with such wonder and delight as I have never heard. You gave me pain; the stinging scratch of your nails in my shoulder, drawing blood. I've never been completely certain and I would require further opportunities for study (a challenge under the circumstances in which we currently find ourselves) but I have often suspected that it was the smell of my blood and the flash of my pain (which you certainly felt, you extraordinary thing), that set you to filling my mouth.

I do not exaggerate when I say I have brought men to their knees, but never before have I inspired one to reposition me bodily using only a grip in my hair, to draw blood from my lip with sharp little teeth and to descend on me in a whirlwind of hands and tongue. In the end, the sight of your hands on me was all that was required; a simple confirmation of synchrony and connection.

We lay there together until the midday sun chased away the shade, then I took you truly to my bed for the first time. That Will, the one wrapped in dark sheets and evening shadows, will visit you on another day. Until then, my darling boy, good night.

Always,

Hannibal

Carefully, Alana separated the final page from the pack and held it up to the light.

Hannibal had drawn Will from the perspective of a kneeling supplicant at the foot of an idol. Will loomed above her, dark-eyed and luminous and enraptured. His chest was bare and there were a chain of tiny, smudge-soft bruises like a necklace across his clavicle, spilling down his side and out of the frame (over slim hips, red-blue on pale skin). A particularly dark and bloody outline of teeth stood out against one sun-darkened pectoral, just over the heart.

Alana could almost feel the gentle give of flesh between her teeth, feel the brush of hair against her cheek. She shifted her involuntarily against the chair, almost a grind. She was wet and the slip of her underwear against her skin was too much.

It was time to go home.

Alana stood abruptly, straightening her skirt. She folded the letter angrily, stuffed it into the envelope and tossed it back to the blotter. It could wait until tomorrow.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Tell him I would say more, but cannot well,
Oppressed minds abrupted tales do tell.

Will receives another letter, but things are not quite what they seem.

Chapter Notes

Title is from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* by Anne Bradstreet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's late when the phone rings. They are tangled together beneath the sheets of the downstairs guest bedroom, having scurried there together after checking in on their soundly sleeping toddler. The nursery in their townhouse adjoins the master suite, and both women were wary of waking their son. Margot, even in post-coital bliss, is unable to ignore a ringing phone and she reaches over Alana's shoulder to check the caller ID.

"Will Graham," she says with a hint of surprise, "turning up like a bad penny." Alana shakes her head, but Margot pushes the cellphone into her hands, saying, "Come on, love. Aren't you just a teensy bit curious?"

"Not really," Alana says shortly, accepting the phone, "I was actually expecting it a sooner, but I guess the postal service in 'Fuck-You-All' Florida must be a little slow." She pushes her dark hair back and brings the phone to her ear.

"Will, what a *pleasant* surprise," Alana drawls, sounding completely unsurprised.

"You might warn a man before you drop a live grenade into his mailbox," Will says without preamble. He's thoroughly pissed off and spoiling for a fight.

Alana remembers, a little fondly, the riled-up southern twang of Will's anger. In better days, when he was angry at Jack over beers in Alana's living room and not down the phone from thousands of miles away, Alana used to tease him. *Mais,* he'd cried once, laughing at her terrible impersonation of his accent *that's terrible, Cher.*

She smoothes the smile from her face before she replies, "You want to catch me up, here, Will?"

"I know you sent it, and I'm sure you read it. Tell me, Alana, was that your idea or Jack's? Does he still think that he can somehow catch me out?" Will's tone is quieter now, more measured. The twang of his anger has been replaced by something colder and smoother, something like Hannibal.

"Catch you out, Will?" Alana shifts carefully to let Margot snuggle against her neck to listen in more fully. Her pointed chin digs painfully into Alana's shoulder. "Catch you doing what? You got more secrets to keep?" Margot looks intrigued at that and Alana sighs. She didn't really want to talk about this tonight.

"I might not have even told Jack about the letters," Alana says softly, "if I hadn't been so surprised to learn that you had been *fucking my lover right under my nose*."

Margot looks alarmed, and confused. Alana waves her free hand to say 'not you, you goose'. Margot subsides and returns to her listening post at Alana's shoulder.

Will is silent for long moments. Alana can hear the heaving of his breath but she doesn't know if it's rage or tears. When he finally speaks he sounds exhausted.

"Alana, I-" he breaks off and she hears him draw a deep breath. It comes out with a sigh, then he says, "I didn't, *couldn't*, think about anything else except him. He was in my head, and I was in his and I was -"

"An asshole?" Alana finishes for him. Margo has her hand over her mouth and her eyes are wide with shocked amusement.

"I was still your friend, Will," Alana says more kindly, "I would have understood. I'm trying to understand now."

Will sighs again. "I spent my waking life in other people's minds. I couldn't tell my illness from the workings of my own mind and it nearly killed me."

"Even with you, Alana," he continues hesitantly, "I couldn't be sure that I was me, and not just a reflection of me from your mind. When you doubted me, I doubted myself."

Alana bites her lip to keep the torrent of guilt from drowning out Will's words.

"Hannibal *saw* me, Alana, and so I saw myself. The image of me that he has, his *imago*, it's um- well," he breaks off, embarrassed, "you've read the letters. Even I'm not immune to flattery." He lets out a shaky chuckle and Alana smiles.

“And it *is* flattering, Hannibal’s regard,” she allows, “even if it’s disingenuous.” She drops her forehead against Margot’s, suddenly exhausted. “What do you want me to do, Will? You want me to destroy them?”

“No,” he sounds panicked at the idea, “don’t do that. Send ‘em on, I’ll give you another address. Hang on.” Alana hears a series of rhythmic taps and then her phone vibrates briefly against her palm. Will has texted her a post office address in Miami.

“Okay, got it. Goodnight, Will.”

“Goodnight,” he replies. His relief at her dismissal is obvious.

Alana drops the phone back on the nightstand then turns to face Margot, who is sitting up straight, eyes wide and bright with mischief “So,” she says with a bright, beaming smile, “Will and Hannibal?”

“Will and Hannibal,” Alana confirms wearily.

“Atta boy,” says Margot wryly, settling down next to Alana and tucking the soft sheets around them. She presses tight against Alana’s back, warm and smooth, smelling of sex and clean skin.

After a moment’s silence, she adds, “I wonder who tops?”

“Of course you do,” Alana snorts. After a beat she adds, “I’ll tell you when I find out.”

****

Will tiptoes into the bedroom he shares with his wife. The familiar bright cotton of their bedspread shimmers blue and black in the moonlight and Molly is asleep in the centre, curled into a tight ball under the covers. The dreamcatcher at the window casts shadows on her face and for a moment Will sees, as if with doubled vision, her soft body bruised and blue and too still.

Not a nightmare, he knows, but a possibility brought about his presence in her life and the stack of thick white paper hidden in the armoire.

He tip-toes across the icy floor and slides open a draw. Inside is a box. It’s not a large box but it nevertheless holds two hearts. On the top of the folded drawings inside is the newest letter, as yet unopened. Will slips it free and pushes the drawer closed, watching Molly all the while for signs that he is observed. She sleeps on as he sneaks back across the bedroom and down the stairs.

In the living room, Will perches on the edge of the ottoman and leans into the warmth of the fire.

Hannibal’s script is as neat and upright ever, elegant even in pencil. Will gently touches his own name on the front of the envelope then slips the opener in, blade held meticulously away from the folded pages within.

My Dearest Will

I feel not unlike Scheherazade, telling tales to you to stave off the inevitable death of my memory in your mind. What will happen to me, I wonder, when you no longer remember me? Will I fade away in truth; nothing more than a specter haunting the locked rooms of my own memory palace?

Will knows that if he lives to be a hundred (unlikely, considering his burgeoning alcoholism) his last thoughts will still be of Hannibal. Not his lover, but rather the erudite stranger in the expensive suit, gazing up at him from the floor of his office in Baltimore on an autumn evening, all those years ago.

But tonight is for the other Hannibal, the one who resides in an empty palace full of Wills. He returns his thoughts to the paper.

*"Of course," you said to me, "*you *would have a suit of armor in your bedroom". Your eyes were wide, incredulous and despite your persistent fascination with that armor (I know you were disappointed when I refused to let you 'try it on'), focussed entirely on me. It was rather overwhelming, away from the colour and light in the garden, to be the sole object of your regard.*

Will puzzles over that paragraph for long minutes. Hannibal knew that the armor had freaked him out. That eyeless visor watching him in his most intimate moments brought to mind the dark, horned, figure from his dreams; its eyes mutely pleading as the stag tightened the ropes to tear it asunder. Wearing the armour would be too much like slipping into the blank cold mind behind those eyes.

He shudders, and quickly reads on.

You have the most remarkable eyes, my darling boy. I'll never completely understand why you felt the need to hide them behind those dreadful spectacles. I was deeply flattered when you felt comfortable enough to remove them finally and set them aside. I felt as if you were removing your own human veil, finally allowing me to see you completely.

That night, you stood on the far side of the bed, against the window, and I could see the light of the first evening's stars reflected in your eyes; so remote and cold and almost excruciatingly lovely.

We didn't touch on our way up the stairs. I worried for a moment that you would pull away from me and in that moment I felt vulnerable as I never had before. You must know by now that my better nature would have gone along with you; the part of me that loves you would have torn away from me, maybe forever.

Will remembers, all right. The air between them in the bedroom had felt like the beginning of a thunderstorm; charged and humming, ready to explode at any moment. Will himself had been electrified, every hair standing on end, skin itching and hands shaking with an overwhelming need to touch. He'd wanted to rip Hannibal's skin open and climb inside. It must have shown in his eyes because no sooner had he turned to speak than Hannibal had been on him, gripping his waist, his neck, forcing his head to the side and breathing him in in

deep gulps. Hannibal's lips were scorching against the skin of his neck and Will had been so hard he had ached.

Will wasn't surprised to find he was hard now. He pressed the heel of his hand against his cock, reluctant to admit, even to himself, here, alone, how much power Hannibal's memory had to arouse him.

I could write pages, my darling Will, of the pleasures of time spent just in kissing you. The warmth of your mouth; the slide of your tongue against mine; the feel of your hands in my hair. I would, if I thought I could hold your attention. I am aware, however, that you prefer to speak more candidly so for my audience's sake, I will move ahead a little.

If I had any remaining delusion about who was holding the cards, it evaporated when you pushed me down onto the bed. Your hand on my back kept me in place, kept me from watching you undress, but I think that no sight could have been more erotic than was the sound of your belt buckle and the cool feel of metal when it slipped away against my ass.

Will shuffled from the ottoman to the floor, gripping the sheaf of paper tightly in his left hand. He pushed his right hand into his pyjama bottoms and shoved them roughly down to bare his cock. He drew his left leg up and leaned against it so he could continue reading as he rubbed his thumb over the tip over the head to spread the first drops of sticky-slick desire.

I straightened an arm to reach for the nightstand and there came a stinging slap. "Stay," you growled in my ear, reaching past me to the bottle. I braced myself for cold but when your fingers finally slid wet across my skin they were warm. I heard you suck them into your mouth with the most obscene sound before you pushed them into me, two together.

You moved so slowly, fingers curved just so either side of my prostate. Another slap, another growl to 'stay'. "What will you give me," I asked, "if I obey?"

"If you are a good boy," you said, twisting your fingers open to stretch me, "I'm going to fuck you."

"And what if I am not?" Obedience has never been my strongest skill, I admit.

"Then," you said, "I will fuck you."

Even so I stayed, lost to the push of your fingers, the feel of your tongue and teeth on my neck and the hand with which you held me down. I heard myself whimper, but I felt no shame.

Will's legs are thrown wide and he is stroking his cock with long, fast, flicks of his wrist. He rubs his wet fingertips over the head with each stroke, pulling closer and closer to orgasm. He lifts his hips, pushes into the tight ring of his fingers and thinks about how it felt to push into Hannibal; his heat and softness and mercilessly tight muscles.

Will had considered for a moment, as he fucked Hannibal almost lazily with one hand, whether he should wear a condom. Somehow he doubted it would protect him against any of the very real dangers Hannibal presented. Latex, he reasoned, was no barrier to madness.

Without that barrier, Hannibal's heat was nearly shocking. Will had fancied that he could feel the individual pulse of each capillary he pushed against and the striae of rippling muscle. He imagined the blood spilling out and through and pooling around his cock as his hips settled against Hannibal's ass and he began a slow pull back.

It would not be an exaggeration to say I had never felt anything like the sensation of you finally inside me. It was exquisite, a blend of pain and pleasure like I had never felt, one feeding on the other. Your thrusts were both ecstasy and aching agony; you had assumed I was experienced and set your pace accordingly.

There was no time to accustom myself to the new sensations; it didn't last long for either of us. You took me in hand and stroked me to completion just a moment before you sobbed out my name against my shoulder. Your hand tightened around me, drawing out my orgasm and drawing from my lips a sound that I had never before heard; something purely animal and other.

Will let the letter drift down to the hearthrug. He brought his hand to his mouth and bit down hard to muffle the cry that came as he ejaculated.

We lay together afterwards, not touching, speaking to the ceiling as we shared a cigarette.

That night I absorbed hungrily all that I could of your hundreds of tiny, little secrets: How your eyes squint when you exhale smoke; how you wrap a towel around your hips only to walk to bed; how closely you scrutinise your face as you brush your teeth; how young you look when you sleep.

Sweet dreams, dearest Will.

Always,

Hannibal

With a pang of regret, Will presses his wet fingertips to the letter then tosses the pages in the fire. He wipes his hands dry on his t-shirt, pulls up his pants and plucks the last page up from the rug.

It's his own face, younger and slack with sleep. His hair tumbles around him, loose curls lovingly defined against the smudged liquid shine of the pillows and sheets.

His bare chest and arms are scattered with tight commas of hair and there are freckles at the base of his throat where his opened shirt sits. Though Will has never worn such a thing in real life, a fine chain circles his neck. Hanging from the chain, just visible as a flash of light in the hollow of his throat, is a key.

Will thinks about the key as he lies awake next to his sleeping wife in the early dawn, and wonders whether he wants to look for the lock.

Chapter End Notes

Yep, another chapter. Thank you to those who read the first and stopped to share kudos or comments.

Not beta'd, so please let me know if you spot anything fishy.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Tell him I would say more, but cannot well,
Oppressed minds abrupted tales do tell.
Now post with double speed, mark what I say,
By all our loves conjure him not to stay.

Will returns to Baltimore. Some things are still blooming in Hannibal's garden.

Chapter Notes

Title from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* Anne Bradstreet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The thought of the key occupies Will all through his flight, then while he drives from the airport into Baltimore and onto the smooth streets of Hannibal's neighbourhood. He thinks about it right up until he pulls the rental vehicle up to the curb outside Hannibal's house and sees the brilliant yellow tape across the door.

Will pulls the tape aside and opens the door, only mildly surprised when his key still works. The foyer is dark and silent and Will flicks the gold-plated switches in the front hall, but the power must have been disconnected as not a single light comes to life to relieve the gloom. He slips his keychain from his pocket and switches on the penlight he keeps for (unexpected) crime scenes and (sadly, expected) mechanical breakdowns.

Each cautious step raises clouds of masonry dust; remains of the forensic team's excavation of the basement, and the sweep of Will's coat disturbs vivid puffs of fingerprint powder from doorways and mirrors. The air smells of dirt and damp wool and beneath that, Will can smell the chemical tang of Luminol. They must have doused every floor and wall, he knows, for the scent to linger after so many months. Probably the furnishings and linens as well, and he knows exactly what they would have found there.

Two contributors. Doctor Lecter and another, unknown, male; we're running the DNA profile but it might take awhile. Blood has priority for bandwidth right now.

Eventually Zeller and Price would discover it. They might have already, but Price would have done his best to bury it amongst the dizzying profusion of blood evidence, bone fragments and frozen organ meat. Will tries to imagine Jack's face when he finally reaches the report appendix listing Will's name in neat, six point sans-serif alongside those of the victims found in Hannibal's pantry. He's trying to decide between 'The Ripper strikes again' and 'who the fuck ate my leftover pizza from the lunchroom fridge' when his cell rings, unthinkably loud in the tomb-like silence of Hannibal's parlour.

Huh, thinks Will when he sees the caller ID. Speak of the devil.

"It's been a while, Jack," he says in a tone that clearly indicates *not long enough* , "how are you?"

"Will Graham," Jack almost snarls his name, "you're a hard man to get hold of".

"Not if I want to talk to you," Will says cooly. He pauses in his examination of the remaining *objet d'art* on bookshelves lining Hannibal's study and stretches out on the *chaise longue* . He balances his phone on his chest and switches to speaker to let Jack's rage echo off the damask wallpaper and high, vaulted ceiling.

"Well," Jack says, and Will can hear him tamping his rage down into a shaped charge, " *I'd* like to talk to *you* , and I think you know why."

"I've got a fair idea," Will replies, running his fingers along the carved fin that crests the back of the *longue* . Hannibal had fucked him over it once, forcing Will down so fiercely that the carving had left a reddened imprint across his belly. Afterwards, Hannibal had kissed the raised marks on Will's skin before swallowing his cock. Will's mouth goes dry. The memory of Hannibal's lips and hands is more vivid here, surrounded by the feel of the fabric and lingering smell of the fireplace and Will feels the beginnings of an incredibly inappropriate erection. He tries to focus on what Jack is saying, to bring his mind back to the present.

"Tell me it isn't true, Will. Tell me Lecter is just trying to push your buttons, or mine, or Alana's. Tell me anything else," Jack adds, sounding a little desperate.

"He is pushing my buttons, Jack," *and you should see what he can do with a zipper* , Will doesn't say, "and yours, and Alana's. But if he wants me to read his letters, I'll read them."

"Why?" Jack asks, confusion and anger warring in his tone, "Why would you let him get to you like that?"

"Because he was my friend, Jack," Will says, and it's close enough to the truth that he thinks Jack will buy it, "and I couldn't help him. I wanted to, and I couldn't."

"He's a killer, Will," Jack sighs, and he sounds defeated.

"I know," and Will *does* know, but it changes exactly nothing of how he feels.

"If you change your mind, you've got my number," Jack says, in lieu of *goodbye* . The phone speaker beeps once and falls silent.

Will feels suddenly, desperately in need of air. The house feels humid and heavy around him, an atmosphere thick as honey with memories of love and laughter and blood and pain.

The dining room, when he stumbles in, feels somewhat like a defiled temple; its sacred spirit dimmed and its relics made ordinary by uninitiated hands. Will closes his eyes against the sight of withered herbs and smears of bright powder over the dark wood of the table. He pushes blindly through the french doors and out into the ornamental side yard.

The lawn is a rich green but too long, brushing Will's knees as he paces toward the gate that leads to the rear of the house. The cherry tree against the fence has already shed its blooms and covers the lawn and path in dappled green shade. At the sight of it, Will stops short.

You pulled me down to the lawn under the ornamental plum tree...

The memory of looking up into blossom-laden branches engulfs him. The bark had been rough against his naked back and his skin had been rubbed painfully raw as he writhed under Hannibal's mouth. The smell of the *sakura* blooms had been so strong and thick that Will could taste it with each gasp and groan. He'd crushed a handful of fallen flowers in his fist as he came, grinding them into Hannibal's hair when he moved his grip to tangle into the loose strands at the nape of his neck. Will remembered the scent of them on Hannibal's skin when he had fucked him later, when they were lost together in the vastness of Hannibal's magnificent bed.

Will comes back to the present, flushed and breathing hard as if he had been sprinting. And speaking of hard, his erection is back with a vengeance; possibly less inappropriate than before but really no more convenient. Will idly considers just taking care of it right here, but jerking off in your former lover's backyard, which is also a crime scene, while the erstwhile owner is imprisoned for murder, seems a little… tacky.

Will doubts Hannibal would mind.

As if to distance himself from his memories, Will folds his legs almost primly as he sinks to the ground beneath the cherry tree. From his pocket he pulls an unopened letter, delivered into his hand by a bored clerk only that morning when he stopped to check his USPS box on the way to the airport.

Dearest Will

I don't believe you were entirely serious when you suggested that I should 'buy you a boat'. In any case, Winston was at least as responsible as I for the demise of your fishing craft.

"Fishing craft," Will mutters sarcastically to the page, "it was a fucking dinghy, Hannibal, but you definitely did sink it."

It seemed only fitting that he and I should work together to provide you with a replacement vessel, something sturdier and more worthy of your skill as a mariner. An Argo *for my beloved Jason.*

Will's intended snort of fond derision turns into a sob and catches in his throat. He swallows hard, just once, then reads on with stinging eyes.

There is no cost that I would not bear to see again your face when you first laid eyes on my gift at dock in the marina. You looked quite as though I had hung a new moon, just for you (and I would, caro, never doubt it).

You hesitated only a moment before breaking the bottle over the bow, but you might have held onto it had you known its age. One must not be miserly when it comes to offering libation to the gods, especially those who may hold such direct sway over our fate on the sea.

We sailed south through the bay, no sound but the wind and the waves. You were a marvel to watch, so strong and graceful and sure of yourself in a way that I could hardly credit as being the same man who slunk into my office on a winter night all those years ago or even the bloody creature who clutched his weapon like a talisman to ward off the evil inside Garratt Hobbs.

I suspect that removing your shirt was more pandering to me than out of any real need, but I thank you for it all the same. I can still sketch you from just that memory; your body gilded by the setting sun like Jason's must also have been when he held the golden fleece.

You dropped anchor just in time to watch the last of the sunset by my side and when it had finally slipped below the horizon, you slipped from your seat also to kneel between my knees. What could I do, my darling? It is not every day a child of the gods offers to worship one in that way. I was erect and ready for you even before you laid your hands on my thighs to push them wide open.

You were uncertain, I know. You concealed it well beneath brazenness and hunger but I felt it in the quiver of your fingers as you opened my trousers. You need not have doubted yourself, and you certainly need not have doubted me; I still see the curled crown of your head there under my hands in my dreams, when I am so fortunate as to dream of you.

Your lips are what I remember most, though. They were cool and chapped and sticky from the salt air and it tickled when you slid back my foreskin from the head. Behind the cold touch of them though, your mouth was the most wonderful velvet heat. It was torture not to push up into tht gentle and hesitant caress, not to thrust and choke you and see your tears. Much as you would later come to appreciate such games, I would have been a crude and greedy man indeed not to accept your gift exactly as you were offering it.

Will unzips his fly and offers a mental apology to the gods of good etiquette. Tacky or not, he is definitely doing this.

He spits on his palm then jerks himself fast and tight to the memory of Hannibal's cock in his mouth; the press of new decking against his knees; and the slick feeling precome where his own erection rubbed against his shorts. In only a few desperate strokes he is coming over his boots and the carpet of grass and fallen leaves under the cherry tree.

Will wipes his palm on the grass and puts the letter carefully back into his pocket. He tucks his cock away and zips up but he'll need to do a more thorough clean up before he feels

comfortable to return to his rental car. On shaking legs, he makes his way through the gate, into the unlocked laundry door and up the back staircase to the upstairs hallway, and then into Hannibal's bedroom.

The mattress is bare and Will is reminded jarringly of how the nurses had stripped the sheets from his father's hospital bed. He pushes the thought away and makes straight for the *en suite* , trying very hard not to see that the walk-in robe is entirely empty.

Will strips quickly and takes a clean washer from the stack that still sits on the edge of the bath. Freshly laundered towels and sheets weren't of much interest to the FBI, especially not when they were so blindingly white they couldn't be other than freshly bleached.

He runs the faucet until the water is clear and then takes a quick spit bath in the sink. He checks his boxers and jeans for any drops he might have missed then dresses quickly and heads for the stairs, not stopping to linger.

Will has no desire to taint his memories of softly starlit sheets and warm morning embraces with the feeling of vacancy and neglect that now hangs over Hannibal's bedroom like a shroud.

Many of the paintings in Hannibal's home were originals, valuable as well as beautiful. Hannibal donated them to the art museum, leaving behind in the hall only those with no value other than beauty, or, occasionally, the sentimental. When Will stops in front of an impressionist-style study of a flowering plum tree, he knows that the value of this particular piece is beyond either.

***

"We had a deal, Hannibal. Your life for Will's." Alana's voice is calm but Hannibal can hear the unspoken threat.

"And," Hannibal drawls cheerfully "dear Will does live. I consider my end of the bargain fulfilled, unless there is something you have yet to reveal." His jaw is relaxed, his hands held loosely behind his back, the very picture of passivity, and yet.

And yet, think Alana, *he is worried* . She considers walking away and letting him stew for a while on whether Will has met some unknown fate. Alana is not the woman who fell in love with Hannibal, but neither is she a monster.

"Saving Will," she says, and her footsteps echo as she approaches the glass, as if to underscore the importance of her words, "also meant saving him from *you* . When you handed yourself in, I assumed you must have known that."

"Have I offered Will some insult?" Hannibal asks in a measured tone as he comes closer to the too-thin wall between them, "have I threatened him?"

"I *don't know* ," Alana spits, letting her frustration show, "I don't understand the point of your little love letters and I don't know what sort of mind-fuck you're trying to work on him, Hannibal, but it stops now," Alana crosses her arms tightly and sets her high-heeled feel

slightly apart, “Inbound mail is a right, but outbound mail is a privilege. One that I am suspending, effective immediately.”

Hannibal presses his lips together tightly and nods once, dismissively. He returns to his desk, seats himself, and picks up a charcoal. Alana takes the last envelope from the secure tray and taps it gently against her palm as she walks away.

***

The sun has set by the time Will locates the series of tiny catches under the lip of the picture frame and manages to pull it away from the wall. He slips his penlight between his teeth and examines the safe panel, wishing that he had brought his reading glasses.

Jesus Christ, even Hannibal’s hidden safe is pretentious. It’s brushed black steel set flush with the wall. The number pad is glass and lights up at his touch, prompting for a fingerprint. Hannibal used to say that he would do anything for Will, but a request for a severed finger might raise a few other eyebrows, and unfortunately Jack’s would be among them. If there is one thing Will is sure of, it’s that he doesn’t want the FBI to have whatever is in this safe.

Will thinks again of that key, a negative space against the charcoal shadows of his throat. He thinks about it, and after careful consideration places his right pointer finger against the panel. A red light flashes twice in rebuke and the safe remains closed.

Will sighs and leans against the wall next to the safe. He closes his eyes and reviews Hannibal’s letters and sketches in his mind, letting the words float and rearrange themselves as gold strokes against the darkness behind his eyelids.

Pair bonding. Honeymoon. Marriage.

Will opens his eyes. He is suddenly very, very tired.

He presses his left ring finger to the panel and watches without surprise as a green light flashes and the door springs open.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you ever so much to those who have hung on this far, and left me such beautiful comments to let me know that you're enjoying it.

Still not beta'd. If you spot any typos or anything that really takes you out of the story then please message me to let me know.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Commend me to the man more lov'd than life
Show him the sorrows of his widow'd wife

A revelation for Will, an olive branch from Alana, and another letter from Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

I have upped the chapter count, because I can't see that this is going to wrap up in only one more. Mostly, because this chapter is only half story and the rest is the folks doing their thing.

Thanks again to those lovely folks who are reading and commenting - it's really what keeps my cogs turning.

Title is from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* by Anne Bradstreet.

“Good night, sweet man,” Molly purrs into Will’s ear. She giggles once, and then she’s gone and Will is alone in the motel room. He drops his cell onto the nightstand and stands to stretch, pacing the width of the small room before pausing at the window to check on his rental car.

Lying to Molly had been easier than Will had expected. He’d painted over his trip to Baltimore with the patina of ‘work’ that covered most of his professional and personal associations. Once Molly understood what Will’s job had done to him; once she’d seen the nightmares and panic attacks and the scars, she didn’t ask many questions.

The contents of Hannibal’s safe are spread out under the window on a small breakfast table and the luxuriously thick, white envelopes look out of place against the cracked, yellowing, laminate. Will leans down and gathers them into his arms, carrying the whole lot over to the bed, where he sets them down gently on the coverlet. He toes off his shoes and sits on the bed with his back to the headboard, within easy reach of the open bottle standing next to his cell phone.

Will takes a long sip of whiskey and carefully unseals the first envelope, a fairly generic looking affair with blue lining, like the kind his paychecks came in. He unfolds two sheets of

printed letter paper and scans the top page, already puzzled.

It's addressed to someone Will has never met, at an unfamiliar box number across the state line in Delaware. It's marine registration papers for a craft called *Cheiron* , and Will knows immediately that this is his *Argo* , renamed and given a clean registry that cannot be tied back to either himself or Hannibal.

Will had (guiltily) mourned when he had thought that the boat had been seized and sold to offset the cost of Hannibal's trial. The boat had not just been his and Hannibal's plaything for long, lazy days on the water, but also a shared joke; a grand gesture; and, to Will, it had been the place where their love had felt the most real. The boat had cradled them, kept them safe from the eyes of the world. He'd missed it.

Two keys have been taped neatly into the envelope. Will peels the tape away and adds the keys to his ring, not letting himself think about what that might mean for his future plans. He returns the pages to the envelope and sets it aside, reaching for the next with a deep, bracing breath.

Will opens the flap and flinches a little in surprise when a whole mess of… stuff falls into his lap. He sorts it slowly: Passports, credit cards, neatly folded birth certificates, drivers licences in at least three languages, and bundles of creased currency. The identification all bears his own likeness but with different names and birthdates. He shoves it all straight back into the envelope.

With a shaking hand, he grabs his glass and drains it in a single swallow. He sets it down and refills it, overshooting a double by at least two fingers. When the glass is empty again, he drops it clumsily on the pillow beside him and turns back to the documents.

The next envelope is similar, but the identification photos are all Hannibal and it holds a number of bank passbooks and account records, all in French and all with different account numbers. There is an entire sheaf of property deeds and a list of law offices neatly penned in Hannibal's hand. Distantly, Will watches his hands filing it all neatly back into the envelope before turning to the last two objects.

There is a small leather wallet that holds dozens of keys in plastic flip pockets like a business card holder. A couple of them look like something out of *Harry Potter* , curling iron and bronze monstrosities that surely must open equally baroque and probably garish doors.

Of course, Hannibal owns a fucking *castle* . Will sighs and puts the wallet onto the night stand beside his own keys.

The last thing is a small velvet pouch. Will unties the cord and gently works the bag open, tipping the contents into his palm. There is a locket, old gold but carefully polished and tended. Inside is a single lock of baby-fine hair the colour of moonlight. Will closes the locket, mindful of the antique latch and pushes it back into the pouch.

Remaining perched on Will's hand are a pair of new, and obviously expensive, heavy gold bands. Will rolls them in his palm thoughtfully, desperately grateful for the comforting buffer of whiskey between himself and whatever is rising in his chest at the sight of the

rings. He wonders how long Hannibal had kept this particular secret and what he would have done if Hannibal had given him the ring any sooner.

It troubles Will that he can't picture it, that this, here and now with their hands so far apart, is the only way he can conceive of Hannibal asking for his heart.

"You fucking bastard," Will curses the empty room in a hoarse voice, "what the fuck am I supposed to do now?"

Only after the documents are stashed carefully in his duffel bag, his teeth are brushed and he has tucked the pouch with the rings and locket carefully under his pillow, does Will close his eyes and let himself cry.

***

Will is woken in the morning by the buzzing of his cell phone. It's still dark out and his head is throbbing, but Will resigns himself to wakefulness and picks up the phone without checking the ID. "...'ello," he slurs.

"Will," chirps Alana brightly, "I hope I didn't wake you."

"Oh, no," Will rasps, throat still raw and swollen from sobbing, "I was already awake," he adds hastily, even though that's not even slightly true.

"Good," Alana says, then, more hesitantly "I was hoping we could talk."

"As long as we can do it over coffee," Will says without thinking.

"You're in Virginia?" She asks, sounding confused and a little bit hurt. He hears the unspoken *why didn't you tell me?* as clearly as if Alana had spoken out loud.

"Baltimore, actually. I can meet you somewhere," Will adds after a beat, "somewhere not the hospital." The idea of being that close to Hannibal and not touching him seems suddenly unbearable.

"Of course," Alana's voice is kind as ever, but Will gets the distinct feeling that she is holding something back, "I understand. I'm in meetings most of the morning but I can sneak out early," she sounds happier now, mischievous, more like her old self, "remember that place with the great beer and the mechanical bull?"

"Oh my God," The memory of falling from the saddle and cutting himself on a spring is still deeply humiliating, but Will's hot blush is from what came afterwards; Hannibal's hands and mouth in the mens' room and how he'd climbed into Hannibal's lap in the front seat of the Bentley, in a darkened street around the corner from the bar, too greedy to wait for the privacy of Hannibal's bed.

"It could have been worse," Alana reminds him cheerfully, "at least there was a doctor handy," and Will is still trying to decide if it's a pun when Alana dissolves into giggles. Okay, it's open season on sex puns. Will supposes that means he is at least partially forgiven.

“Uh huh,” he squeaks, unsure if he is going to laugh or simply expire from humiliation. Fuck it, he thinks, in for a penny, in for a pound, “I think you meant *handsy* .”

Alana’s laugh is sweet and unselfconscious and Will feels something inside his chest start to loosen. Could they have done this, if he had told her before? Could they have giggled together about Hannibal like schoolgirls with a crush? It certainly would have been a relief to have someone to talk to.

“I’ll meet you there at four,” Alana says, when she can talk again, “and you can tell me what really happened while he was stitching you up in the bathroom.”

“I’ll need a drink for that,” he says truthfully, face still hot, “maybe more than one.”

“I’ll buy,” Alana laughs, and hangs up.

Will showers, shaves, and wanders to the motel office to pay for another night. With a glance at Will’s creased face, the clerk gestures silently to the hotplate on the counter and Will pours himself a paper cup of coffee. He drinks it on the walk back to his room and lets himself think about the weight of rings in his hand, and the neatly packaged new lives in his duffel bag. Will looks at the ring on his finger and thinks of Molly, waiting for him to come home.

Back in the room, he grabs his keys from the nightstand, throws his duffel in the back seat of the rental car and puts the key wallet and jewellery pouch on the front seat next to his cell phone and a tourist map of the Delmarva Peninsula. The coffee has pushed Will’s hangover back to the periphery of his awareness, but he dry swallows a couple of aspirin anyway from the bottle in the glovebox before he peels out of the parking lot. He’s got a long drive ahead of him.

***

“I know you’re still writing,” Alana says without preamble.

“But Will is not reading, and isn’t that what you wanted?” Hannibal asks tiredly without looking up from his sketchbook.

“What I wanted,” Alana says cautiously, “is what is best for Will. It occurred to me this morning,” she continues, “that it isn’t my place to decide what exactly that entails. I’m your doctor, not his.”

“Thank Goodness for small mercies,” Hannibal says drily, but he sets his charcoal down and looks up at Alana, brown eyes bright with curiosity. “What brought about your abrupt change of heart?”

“Will did, actually. He-”

“You spoke to him?” Hannibal cuts her off, leaning forward in his chair, “what did he say?”

Alana lets her amusement show, smiling at Hannibal as she draws a chair up to the plexiglass. “Among other things, that you were groping him under the table that night we

went to that cowboy bar." Hannibal's eyes widen briefly in surprise, but his expression settles quickly into a single raised eyebrow.

"Did he, indeed?" Hannibal carries his chair over and places it carefully opposite Alana on the other side of the window. He seats himself neatly, then continues, "it is hard to imagine the conversational gambit that successfully secured such a confidence."

"I'm meeting him there this afternoon," Alana hesitates, then continues, "have your letters ready and I'll deliver them to him."

"Thank you, Alana." Hannibal says softly. Alana nods once, then departs, trailing *Tobacco Vanille* in her wake.

Hannibal returns to his desk, retreating from the strong scent. He smiles as he takes up a fresh sheet of paper; he knows exactly which tale to tell.

***

Dearest Will,

I suspect that despite having read my passionate retellings of our liaisons, Alana casts me in her mind as the conqueror and you, my darling, as the naïve ingénue; bending hesitantly to my desire.

Will you look her in the eye this evening and play the innocent? Will you sit in the same booth where you kissed me with blood on your tongue and apologise for letting me seduce you, or will you tell her the truth?

Will you tell her that while she was worrying for you, while she was haggling with the bartender for ice and towels, that you were licking blood from your fingers? Your tongue slid between them, wet and pink and obscene and I could see in your eyes that you knew how aroused I was; how I was erect just from watching you.

Blood ran down your arm and pooled in your elbow. It looked like wine in the dim light and I couldn't stand it for another moment. "Come here, wicked boy, *I whispered,* I must have you closer." *You moved next to me and laid your bleeding arm on the table between us like a gift. You seized my jaw in bloody fingers and kissed me and you tasted like iron and copper. I was dizzy with the scent of you, surrounded by a cloud of desire and blood. You grabbed my cock, stroked me roughly until I groaned.*

Much too soon, the kiss was over and Alana returned with clean towels. I wrapped your arm and took you to the bathroom to wash up and stitch your cut. You trembled as I tied off the knots, and thrust against my thigh; tiny jerking movements in time with your panting breath. As soon as I put the kit away, you pulled me into a stall and unzipped your fly without even locking the door. You simply leaned against it and pushed at my shoulders, forcing me down to the filthy floor.

Until you, Will, I never considered the appeal of so sordid an assignation. Sensual delights were something of beauty for me to savour like a fine meal or a work of art; a luxurious way

to please and pamper my senses. I had never hungered for someone the way I hungered for you, the way I hunger for you still.

You forced yourself deep into my throat, taking roughly and with abandon that which you had up until then accepted only with shy and gracious delight. When I swallowed around you, you cried out and when I gagged, you cursed me and called my name. You held my jaw and forced my eyes up to meet yours, and I saw my own hunger reflected back at me. Overwhelmed, I closed my eyes.

When I opened them again you were kneeling astride me, kissing me, opening my pants so you could stroke us both. I laid my fingers over yours, already so slick, and I could smell our desire mingled in the moments before you finished, spilling wet heat over our joined hands. I reached completion only moments later with the taste of your blood still on my lips.

Will you think of me tonight when you pass through those horrible saloon-style doors into the mens' room? Will you stroke yourself, guiltily, thinking of me, biting your lip to keep those delightful moans from revealing your secret pleasure to the strangers outside?

I will think of you.

Always,

Hannibal

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When Alana comes, he places two sealed envelopes into the tray. She blushes as she tucks them into her purse, but Hannibal is confident that she won't embarrass Will by breaking the seals. Wisely or unwisely, Alana trusts him to share anything probative.

Hannibal smirks slightly at Alana's reddened cheeks and wishes her a good evening. She asks, a little sheepishly, "is there anything you want me to tell him?"

"Tell him," Hannibal says thoughtfully, hands clasped behind his back, "to stay away from the mechanical bull. I would hate for him to come to further harm."

"By any design other than yours, of course," Alana says with a raised eyebrow.

"Of course," Hannibal agrees mildly, and resumes his seat at the desk.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

And, if he love, how can he there abide?
My interest's more than all the world beside.

Will gets his drink, Alana gets her gossip, and things get interesting.

Chapter Notes

Title is from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* by Anne Bradstreet.

Thank you to everyone who has read and reviewed, and left me treasured kudos. You are the reason this story is still going and might actually get finished.

Now

The interior of the bar is cool and quiet, a relief after the rushing river of humanity filling up the street outside. It's only just after four on a Tuesday but there are a few tourists leaning against the bar and a cluster of young men in cheap suits at one of the tables, a mess of empty beers and side plates spread between them. A waitress approaches and they turn as one to watch her as she pulls a notepad and pen from the pocket of her (extremely short) shorts. *Juvenile predators,* Will thinks, watching one fox-faced man leer obviously at the young women's breasts. Their greedy thoughts are of catching, fighting, and fucking; there's nothing graceful in their designs.

Will is weary from driving, weary from thinking, and his walk on the crowded street has left him with a headache. He drops into the booth with a sigh and signals the waitress.

"Boilermaker," he says when she saunters over, "a double, please, and a glass of ice water," he leans back and tries for a smile, but suspects it's closer to a grimace. The waitress looks a little concerned and she leans down, her pretty brow wrinkling.

"You okay, mister?" she asks in a drawl that reminds him of home.

" *Ça va, cher,* " he says, tiredly, letting his north-east affectation slip a little to put her at ease, "just a little too much sun," after a beat, he adds, "got some aspirin here somewhere," and the girl seems reassured.

“You just been away from home too long,” she laughs, and sashays off to the bar to fix his drink.

The waitress returns with his drinks, a jug of water, and a basket of fries, which she sets down with a secretive smile. “A little *lagniappe* ,” she says in a conspiratorial tone, “you look like you could use it,” he thanks her, and this time his smile is genuine. As she walks away, the door to the bar swings open and Alana steps in.

Alana’s sleek hair and low-cut silk blouse look almost comically out of place here among the raw boards, licence plates and steer horns, but she strides across the floor like it’s a catwalk, ignoring the frank and lecherous stares from the table of cheap suits. Will stands to greet her and she strides straight into him, flinging her arms about his shoulders and whispering fiercely, “God, I’ve missed you.”

Alana folds herself into the booth and scoots around the table, patting the bench in invitation. Will sits down next to her, already turning to signal the waitress for another drink when out of the corner of his eye, he sees Alana downing his whiskey in a single graceful swallow. “Make that two,” he calls toward the bar, one baleful eye on Alana as she drops the whiskey glass and picks up his beer.

“I’d, um, ask you how your day was, but,” Will gestures to the empty glasses on the table between them, “quod erat demonstratum. Dare I ask what happened?”

Alana presses her lips together in a tight, thin line of brilliant scarlet like a wound across her face. “Funding reduction happened; Frederick Chilton happened; Hannibal *fucking* Lecter happened. Any one of those might have compelled me to the nearest decanter, but all three of them in one day is like the holy trinity of drinking away my sorrows,” she stops, seemingly embarrassed by her outburst, then adds, “he just gets under my skin, you know?”

Will nods. He knows.

The waitress delivers their drinks and Alana smiles politely before raising her beer in a toast. “To Hannibal fucking Lecter.”

“Hannibal fucking Lecter,” Will echoes with amusement, sipping his whiskey. Alana puts her beer down and rifles through her oversized purse.

“Here,” she says, slapping down two envelopes onto the table, “before I change my mind.”

“Alana, I-” but whatever Will is going to say evaporates when Alana places her cool hands over his and wraps his fingers around the thick, smooth paper.

“I haven’t read them,” she adds quietly, in answer the blush that’s creeping across Will’s cheekbones, “I hope you’ll tell me if there is anything in there I, or Jack, need to know.”

“Of course,” Will murmurs fervently, sweeping the letters off the table and into his satchel.

They sit there for long minutes in mutually agreeable silence. The cheap suits start hustling tourists around a pool table and the crowd around the bar deepens as the clock creeps past

five and into happy hour. The waitress, without being asked, brings another round and Alana, with an impish smile, orders a grill plate.

“Margot’s still vegetarian,” she says by way of explanation, “we don’t have any meat in the house at all. Morgan’s never even had a Happy Meal.”

Will has to laugh. “He’s not missing much,” he says thoughtfully, remembering his own childhood. Being on the road with his dad had meant days at a time of drive through and gas station dinners. The first meal in a new home; jambalaya or sausage or fresh-caught fish if they’d crossed a river, and knowing that there were leftovers with eggs and baguette for breakfast, *those* were Will’s favourite meals.

Alana and Jack had avoided meat for months after Hannibal’s arrest, after his kitchen had been searched and the full extent of his *House of Horrors* had been made public via Tattle Crime. Will had no doubt that many of Baltimore’s social elite had followed suit, revising Hannibal’s dinner menus in scandalised whispers over platters of vegetarian sushi and mock-shrimp.

The food arrives and Alana’s eyes light up. “I’m starving!” she exclaims, and digs in with gusto. Will chuckles at her and waves away her offer to fix him a plate, but he plucks up a few wings from the platter with his fingers and chews slowly, hoping not to re-aggravate his headache. It’s hardly gourmet fare, but the sauce is spicy and not too sweet and the familiar texture of slow-baked meat is comforting.

Will remembers Hannibal, picking fussily at a shrimp salad and actually *shuddering* as Will and Alana stuffed themselves with tacos and tostadas. Hannibal had threatened, quietly, to wash Will’s mouth out with soap before he would even consider enduring it on any part of his anatomy. Fortunately for them both, he hadn’t remembered his promise when the moment came.

“So,” Alana says once she has wiped her fingers and set her plate aside, “you tell me, Special Agent. Are we actually in the same booth, or do they just all look the same?”

“I haven’t been an agent for a long time, special or otherwise,” Will reminds her, “but yeah it’s the same booth,” he confirms, hoping he isn’t blushing this time although he suspects he might be. Fuck biology.

“Will…” Alana draws his name out in a sing-song voice, like a schoolyard rhyme, “you’re blushing. Is there something you want to share with the class?” She rests her chin in her clasped hands and leans her elbows on the table, looking expectant.

“We’ve definitely had more than one drink,” she adds, sweeping a hand over the table to indicate her meaning. The waitress had returned again as Alana finished her meal to gather up the dishes and place a fresh round in front of each of them.

Will finds himself struggling to begin. He *wants* to tell her, he wants her to know that it wasn’t just high-minded dirty letters and expensive sheets and mind-fucking; he wants to share the sweetness and the fun and the everyday regular fucking. He wants to honour what they had, not to reduce it or excuse it. He’s just not sure if Alana is ready to hear it.

“Okay,” he says with a deep breath, “what do you want to know?”

“Well,” she says slowly, “first, I want to know what really happened in the bathroom. You two were gone nearly half an hour and when you got back *you* looked like you’d been dragged ass-first through a hedge.”

“Me?” Will splutters, eyebrows raised, “He’s the one who was-” he breaks off, realising he had been ready to tell Alana about Hannibal on the floor of the stall, his expensive suit crumpling where he knelt on the filthy tiles.

“He’s the one who was *what* , Will?” Alana’s eyes are wide and shining in the dark of the bar and a dangerous smile is curving her lip. Will closes his eyes and breathes out a sigh. He knows he’s blushing, but he’s getting past too drunk to care.

“He’s the one who was on his knees,” Will whispers, embarrassed. Alana giggles, and holds up her beer bottle for Will to toast.

“You know, Graham, you really live on the wild side. It’s not like I *knew* he was a cannibal when I let him eat me out.” She takes a long drink of her beer and watches Will from over the bottle.

For a horrible moment Will doesn’t know whether he is going to laugh or cry. His breath catches in his throat and burns like liquor. He panics, panting. Finally, Will downs his whiskey in a last-effort to control the hysterical giggles that are threatening to break free.

“The ultimate exercise in trust,” he says eventually. Alana giggles again.

“And after?” She asks with a coy smile, “you two hustled me into the cab so quickly I thought that something must be on fire.”

“After?” Asks Will, just as coy, “afterwards, we went home.”

***

Then

Will stands on the sidewalk, hunched into his light jacket, watching Hannibal help Alana into a cab. The wind off the water cuts straight through his layers of canvas and cotton and he shivers, missing the heat of Hannibal’s body beside him and the warm weight of his thigh against Will’s, pressed together under the table of their booth.

Alana had quite obviously intended for Will to take the taxi, looking up at Hannibal from under her lashes, hinting with an inviting smile at a ride and offering to make him a coffee for the drive home. Hannibal had taken her hand graciously and, with a smile of his own, assured her that if only Will wasn’t injured, if only he didn’t have a responsibility to ensure Will’s wellbeing, well, *then* it would be his pleasure to offer her a ride. Will had fumed quietly through the entire exchange, hiding his discomfort and jealousy behind what he hoped was an amused and indulgent smile.

At last, Alana and her inviting smile and her eyelashes are secured in the backseat of the cab and Hannibal is knocking on the tailgate to signal the driver. He turns to Will, smile more crooked and more genuine than what he had offered Alana, sharp like a shark's in the glimmering light spilling from the bar windows.

"Now," he says softly, approaching Will and catching him around the waist, "I believe I offered you a ride?"

Will says, with as much innocence as he can muster, "and here I thought you were only offering to drive me home. Now," he turns his lips to Hannibal's cheek and murmurs more softly, "don't you go getting any funny ideas. I'm a nice fella."

"Indeed you are," Hannibal agrees. As they turn into a side street leading away from the harbour, he stops and pivots quickly, crowding Will against a darkened shopfront. "I, however," he growls into Will's neck, "make no such pretensions. You...should...be…" he mutters, punctuating his words with warming kisses pressed to the chilled skin above the neck of Will's t-shirt, "more careful from whom you accept rides," Hannibal presses one long thigh in between Will's denim-clad knees and Will lets his legs fall lazily apart, pressing his shoulders into the cold tile at his back and rolling his hips forward. He hears a slight hitch in Hannibal's breath as he moves, so he does it again, surprised to find that he is already half-hard.

It was only two hours before that they had knelt on the floor of the men's room stall, fingers sticky, sharing sated, messy kisses, completely drained of desire. It seems impossible that such hunger could again be clawing at Will's guts, heating his skin everywhere that Hannibal touches like a brand lit from inside of himself. Will hears a shockingly loud moan and is embarrassed to realise it is *his* voice, echoing brokenly around the quiet, narrow street. Hannibal is licking the thin skin over Will's clavicle; sucking, *biting* , and Will has his fingers tangled in Hannibal's hair, pulling the neat coif asunder.

"Fuck, Hannibal," Will whispers, "are we doing this here?"

Hannibal chuckles into Will's neck and murmurs, "if you have a more suitable venue in mind, my darling, I'm happy to oblige. Otherwise," he pushes his hips down firmly against Will's, a dragging slide of wool against denim that makes Will whimper, "I can think of nothing I'd like better than to fuck you right here in the street."

"Why, Doctor Lecter," Will drawls breathlessly, "it seems I've whetted your appetite for, how did you put it? Sordid assignations."

Hannibal steps back just far enough to take in the sight of Will leaning against the wall. Will's hair is mussed from Hannibal's fingers and a stray curl is clinging to his flushed face. There is a dark blush spread over his cheeks and down into the neck of his shirt and his lips are swollen, glistening wetly in the weak light. Hannibal licks his own lips in an unconscious echo. Will's erection tents his jeans obscenely just below the heavy line of his belt, visible where Hannibal's hands have pushed up the hem of Will's t-shirt.

"You are, at this moment," Hannibal breathes, moving back in close enough to cage Will between his powerful arms, "the perfect lure to tempt any man, no matter how refined, to

ruder pleasures than he is otherwise accustomed."

Will laughs, a little dizzy, "did you just call me *rough trade* ?" he asks disbelievingly.

"Do you deny it?" Hannibal asks, palming Will's cock through his jeans. Will groans and leans elegantly back against the wall, considering Hannibal from beneath his lashes.

"Which answer is going to get me laid the fastest?" Hannibal's hand tightens on him and Will's laugh becomes a broken moan.

Hannibal growls and slides his arms down to Will's waist, turning him towards the line of parked cars at the curb and pushing him gently backwards and away, saying in a low voice, "cheeky boy, into the car with you before I change my mind."

Will slides into the passenger seat, relishing the feel of warming leather against his back and shoulders. While Hannibal is occupied with adjusting the stereo, Will pounces.

He pins Hannibal with a hand to each of his thighs, pressing himself into the space between Hannibal's chest and the steering wheel until Hannibal is forced to lean back into his seat. Will curls himself down further, nuzzling warm skin exposed where Hannibal's shirt has pulled from his trousers. He takes the belt delicately between his teeth and pulls back until he feels it release, moving on to the hook catch and then the zipper. Inside the expensive slacks is nothing but Hannibal, just as Will knew it would be.

Will takes the head - just the head - of Hannibal's cock into his mouth in a long sucking kiss, quietly relishing the groan from above him. As he pushes down, nudging the foreskin back with his lips, Hannibal's hand comes to rest gently in Will's hair, just tangling in the curls near the nape of his neck. He strokes down Will's neck and over the curve of his spine, coming to rest just above the waistband of his jeans, stroking the warm skin under the hem of Will's tee-shirt.

Will tightens his lips in response, scraping Hannibal's length gently with his teeth before sucking as much as he can into his mouth, the angle of Will's neck too awkward for more. Hannibal draws in his breath in a long hiss, breathing out again a worshipful sigh of "Will…"

Will pulls off gently with one last, lingering kiss to the head. He sits up only long enough to shimmy out of his jeans and boxers, then turns back to Hannibal to ask if the lube is still in the glovebox. Hannibal is stroking himself slowly, hands and cock glistening wetly in the light from the street and Will realises that he must have had the tube in his pocket the whole time. *Sneaky bastard* .

Will is usually one not just to look a gift horse in the mouth, but to check its teeth and hoofs. On this occasion, he simply thanks whoever is listening for his good fortune and climbs across Hannibal to straddle his lap.

Will positions himself and slides down slowly, one burning inch at a time, bracing himself against the headrest with one hand and gripping Hannibal's cock with the other. When their thighs are flush he stops, breathing deeply and willing himself to relax. Hannibal watches

him with wide dark eyes, lips parted, fingers resting cautiously on Will's hips and petting tiny circles on his skin.

"Please, Will," Hannibal breathes, his accent thickening and twisting his words, " *please mon bijou,"* and Will kisses him to taste the sweetness of his pleading, to swallow the endearment; such are bestowed only like this, in whispers in the dark. He hoards the memories of how each one sounds and replays them in his mind when they are not together.

The kiss stretches on; teeth and tongues and breath and sighs tangled together in a beautiful tapestry of sensation woven together with tight rolls of Will's hips. Hannibal pushes up, smoothly at first then in stuttering, desperate, staccato movements. Will breaks their kiss to groan into Hannibal's ear.

" *Fuck* , Hannibal," he pants, seizing the shell of Hannibal's ear in his teeth, "just like that, *please.* " He's rewarded with a wordless, guttural cry and a long sucking kiss over his Adam's apple. Hannibal's lips slide lower, into the soft hollow of Will's neck, and the kiss becomes a firm bite.

Hannibal wraps one hand around Will's cock and digs the fingers of the other into Will's thigh, hard enough to bruise. The pain and pleasure together throw a switch deep inside Will and he's coming in rippling waves of pleasure and the wet heat of semen over Hannibal's chest. Will knows he is crying out, wordless and broken like a wounded animal and loud enough to be heard outside, but he can't bring himself to care.

Hannibal's release is silent, his body almost painfully rigid below Will, his head thrown back against the seat and his eyes closed. Will feels the heat of Hannibal's release inside him and the sharp, bright pain of his fingernails breaking the skin of Will's thigh.

When it's over they pant against each other's mouths, sharing damp air and tiny sipping kisses between shuddering breaths. Will is the first to move, rolling himself clumsily back to the passenger seat and trying not to transfer anything damp or sticky onto the upholstery. He wriggles into his jeans and boxers, wincing a little bit at the way the damp fabric clings.

Will is cleaning his hands and face with a wet wipe when he notices that Hannibal has finished dressing and is gazing at him. He grins a little self-consciously and runs a hand over his hair, smoothing it down as best he can with his fingers.

"What?" Will laughs, but he feels pinned by that gaze, like a sample under a microscope.

Hannibal looks down at his hands, wiped clean now and resting on the steering wheel, then back up to Will. His hair is falling over his forehead and glistens gold and silver in the light. His eyes are black, luminous in his angular face. He smiles, almost sadly.

"Love," he murmurs, almost as if to himself, "is such a strange concept. One moment there is desire, regard, admiration, and the next it is all transmuted into one; one feeling, one word, one undefinable thing more valuable by far than the sum of its components."

"Alchemists communicated their knowledge using obscure codes and metaphors," says Will with a curious tilt of his head, "known only to those who had been apprenticed, examined,

and found worthy. I, on the other hand," he continues, looking directly into Hannibal's face, "don't want to risk being misunderstood, so I'll speak plainly." He takes Hannibal's hand in his and presses it to his chest inside his jacket.

"I love you too."

***

Now

Alana kisses Will on the cheek and slips into the cab. "Are you sure you don't want to come back with me? I'm sure Margot would love to see you."

"Now why," he says facetiously, "wouldn't I want to hang out with you, who I had a crush on, and your wife, who I used to sleep with, and talk about my lover who is in prison for killing and eating people?" He looks around thoughtfully, then grins. "Nevermind, I remember."

"Fine," Alana says, pouting playfully, "be that way. But don't you dare leave town without saying goodbye, Will Graham." She pulls the door closed and the cab takes off. Will watches the red lights fade into the night before pulling out the cab number he got from the motel.

***

Now

Bare feet standing in damp, cold grass. Blood drips, black and viscous in the moonlight.

The Great Red Dragon opens his mouth, a yawning maw already filled with yellow, angled teeth, already dark with blood. He raises his bloodied face and hands to the full moon, as if offering up evidence of his devotion, his worthiness. Blood drips from his fingers and arms, a red-black libation soaking slowly into the grass.

The call comes from deep inside his chest, a feral, full-throated howl. The call of a hunter, a warning to the other wild creatures that there is a killer among them; a *king* among them.

For what is the dragon, if not king of all the beasts?

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Phoebus make haste, the day's too long, begone,

A Love Letter To Her Husband
Anne Bradstreet

Chapter Notes

If anyone reading this knows anything about boats or sailing I am both embarrassed and extremely sorry. I know very little and I couldn't even work out how to ask Google to teach me.

There was a bit of a delay with this chapter (and another increase in the chapter count) due to invasions from real life like work, overdue essays and sick kids and the complications that arise from trying to tie story events back into the canon timeline. Any awkwardness can be directly attributed to losing my thread of Will's thinking while I was writing this.

Dialogue in this chapter from Hannibal episodes 3X08 and 3X09.

Yesterday

The marina was much as Will remembered; little more than a large shed perched on the edge of the wetlands next to the canal. The front office is empty when he arrives but eventually a grey-haired woman with smiling eyes appears and asks for his ID. Will, with a calm he doesn't quite feel, hands over a New Jersey license that matches the name on *Cherion's* registration papers.

The woman waves Will out a door propped open with a boxy steel ashtray and bearing a faded sign that reads 'employees only'. Upon stepping through Will finds himself on a narrow walkway bordered with a waist-height hurricane fence, the only thing to stop unwary visitors from tumbling into the canal. He stands still for a few moments, letting his eyes adjust to the bright morning sun and breathing in the brackish smell of the wetlands. After a while, *Argo* 's sleek outline emerges from the tangle of masts and beams, her upper deck clearly visible above the small, squat, fishing boats and low-lying speeders.

The hull has been repainted and her new name and registration shine black as oil against the pale bow, but Will could probably have found his way onboard with his eyes closed. He all but runs to the slip and, upon reaching it, he surrenders to the impulse to *leap* , landing lightly on the lower stern deck. After a quick inspection, he sets to work casting off.

***

Perched in the upper cockpit, Will can almost pretend that he isn't alone. He can allow himself to believe, just for a moment or two, that if he went below he would find Hannibal stretched out on the lower deck with his sketchbook, or fussing around the galley with a glass of wine at his elbow.

He tests the thought of a future where sun-warmed skin presses to sun-warmed skin and their kisses taste of white wine and cool wind. They will eat at the dining table, port windows turned always to the setting sun, and they will fuck between the sheets of the oversize master bunk and whatever this is now will lie behind them, left to the depths of the Atlantic.

Will pointedly *doesn't* think about how Molly fits (*she doesn't fit* , says a traitorous voice) into this future. Whatever Will decides, he knows that he can't go back to the life he left.

When he arrives at the dock, Will climbs down to the deck by the outside ladder and keeps his gaze turned from the cabin windows. It's easier if he doesn't have to see the empty space that he and Hannibal had filled with light and life.

Will climbs the winding stairs up the cliff, stopping halfway to bring out his phone and check the altimeter. It is an impulse that he hasn't yet taken time to unpack, one that he isn't sure he wants to consider; he simply makes a mental note of the height and keeps moving. When he reaches the top, Will checks carefully where the lip of the cliff aligns with the wooden landings and open ocean below. He stores that information in the same folder in his head as the cliff height, and names it 'I Really Hope Not' before shoving the whole thing right to the back of his mind and stepping into the yard.

He sticks to the edges of the neatly-kept lawn, deliberately skirting the patio and keeping his eyes averted from the house and his mind averted from the question of who was doing the gardening. Will feels the windows of the house like eyes - or perhaps they *are* actual eyes - on his back as he fumbles for the key fob in his pocket and opens the garage door. Inside are a low, sporty-looking silver roadster and a well-kept white Land Rover Defender. With a regretful look at the roadster, Will tosses his bag into the Land Rover and climbs in after it. He starts the engine, careful to keep to a low gear on the gravel driveway. When he reaches the gate to the sealed road, he hits the gas without a backwards glance.

After a hundred miles or so, when his heart stops racing, Will pulls into a gas station and buys a Red Bull and a prepaid cell phone which he uses to send a single message before cracking the flimsy case and tossing the whole thing into a dumpster.

Been and gone. Keys are in the garage. You'll need to go to the store.

He checks his watch. There is just enough time to get back to Baltimore to meet Alana.

***

Today

Will is hungover, slouched against the headboard of his motel bed with a takeaway coffee cup between his knees, watching the news. The ticker reads *FBI LINKS CHICAGO FAMILY SLAYING TO NEW YORK KILLING* in lurid letters, red-on-white like blood in the snow. Will closes his eyes and the words twist and melt behind his eyelids, becoming pools of wet, red, carpet and white flashes of moonlight on a mirror. His head aches.

When Will opens his eyes again, there is a video playing behind the sleek blonde anchorwoman, grainy footage of a familiar silhouette hulking behind yellow crime tape, waving away the unseen cameraman with a huge gloved hand. Jack.

Will turns off the television and tosses the remote spitefully across the room. It lands with a muffled thud in a shadowed corner near a bookcase.

"Fuck off, Jack," he spits, looking down to the letters lying beside him on the coverlet, "I need more time." But in his heart, Will knows that time is running out and there's nothing left he can do - from here it's just luck and love and instinct.

Will, much too drunk last night to do anything more than fall onto the bed (he hadn't even taken off his fucking shoes), had awoken to piss at some Godforsaken hour and, on his way from the bathroom, had pulled Hannibal's letters from his bag and tucked them under the unoccupied pillow. Upon opening his eyes, he had been greeted with the sight of his name in that achingly familiar calligraphic print.

Now, sober enough and properly awake, Will opens the neat seal on the first letter and drops down against the pillow to read. As he unfolds the page, a piece of newsprint falls free and drifts down to his bent elbow.

Dearest Will,

We have all found a new life, but our old lives hover in the shadows, like incipient madness. Do you feel me, waiting for you in the palace of my mind? Calling your name down the corridors of my beginnings?

There is one more you left, concealed in the darkest corner of my rememberings. I shall show him to you soon, in hope that you might understand the part that he, and you, have still to play, and the choice that you have to make.

Soon enough, I fear Jack Crawford will come knocking. I would encourage you, as a friend, not to step back through the door he holds open. It's dark on the other side and madness is waiting.

Yours,

Hannibal

Will lifts the newspaper clipping and flips it over. The bold print headline screams *Tooth Fairy Massacres 'Perfect' Families* . Will scans the article, taking in details that he had already gleaned from the television news and searching for anything new that will help him to understand what is driving Hannibal's interest in the killer.

Still holding the clipping in his fingers, Will closes his eyes and for the first time in years, he lets the pendulum swing.

The darkness behind his eyes lifts and he is overwhelmed with bright light, so white and clear it makes his head ache. When he looks down, his hands are pale, chilled, and dripping with blood so dark it reflects black in the cold light and his mouth is filled with the coppery taste of blood. He looks up and sees a full moon riding high in the sky above him, calling him to run, to hunt, to *kill* .

He lifts his face to the sky and screams; a full throated roar that shakes the ground beneath his feet, that moves the bones of the very Earth. He is great and terrible; he is the *Dragon* .

Will opens his eyes.

***

She looks pale , Jack thinks, watching Alana over the edge of his notebook. Alana lifts her cup for a sip of coffee but as it reaches her lips she shudders delicately and places the cup down, pushing it to the far corner of her desk. Jack looks up sharply, reminded strongly for a moment of Bella in the early days of her illness.

"I'm not sick, Jack," Alana says tiredly in answer to his raised eyebrow, "just a little hungover," she adds sheepishly and reaches for her water glass. Jack chuckles quietly and shakes his head.

"And to think you are someone's mother," he says chidingly, sliding a battered bottle of Tylenol across the desk.

"Thanks," Alana smiles weakly and takes the bottle gratefully, swallowing two tablets with a cringe and then passing it back to Jack.

"I've missed them," Alana says after a minute, "Margot and Morgan. But boy was I glad to be alone when I got home last night. There wasn't a soul to witness my shame," she adds with a self-deprecating smile.

"Was it a special occasion?" Jack asks, and Alana is struck with the thought *he knows* .

"No," she says breezily, sliding back from her desk and standing, "just an old friend in town. Shall we?" Alana gestures to the door meaningfully.

Jack stands, knowing that Alana won't confirm his suspicions. "We shall."

Jack looks back down the corridor toward the lobby as they walk deeper into the hospital. He counts the doorways through which they pass, making note of the guards and security

checks. Alana watches him curiously, but says nothing. Jack, feeling foolish, tries to explain.

“I need to know, after Abel Gideon,” he says haltingly, “I need to *know*- ”

“There are five doors between Hannibal and the outside world,” Alana says, placing a delicate hand on Jack’s arm to pause his stride, “five locked and guarded doors, and I’m the only one with all the keys. And believe me,” she adds, her eyes darkening, “I have more reason than anyone to keep those doors locked.”

They pass through the heavy steel door into the antechamber in front of Hannibal’s cell. An armed guard opens the door and precedes them, carefully sighting all the locks and fastenings on Hannibal’s glass cage before retreating to the threshold. Alana nods to him, and the guard steps back, closing the door.

Hannibal is at his desk when they enter, a book and a notebook spread open before him. He doesn’t stand until he hears the guard withdraw.

“As I live and breathe. I thought I'd seen the last of you, Jack,” Hannibal steps delicately towards the plexiglass, hands to his sides and palms open.

“Doctor Lecter,” Jack inclines his head in greeting.

“You're dressing younger,” Hannibal observes, letting his gaze obviously on Jack’s chest, his shoulders, “have you taken up some sport you enjoy with a new partner? Tennis, maybe?” Hannibal doesn’t need to look, he doesn’t need to ask. He can smell the faint remains of *Mitsouko* that hang on Jack’s skin. A younger woman, then. One with carefully contrived good taste but none of Bella’s natural style.

Jack clears his throat, clearly discomforted by Hannibal’s examination. “You've taken up your sport with an old partner,” he says, trying to keep his tone free of any innuendo. He knows Hannibal will hear it anyway.

Hannibal smiles, a predatory grin that shows sharp, crooked, slightly off-colour, canines. “I wrote Will a note warning him you'd come calling,” he says slyly, tapping one finger against his lips.

Jack looks to Alana, who shrugs her shoulders. “I didn’t read anything like that,” she says, obviously choosing her words carefully.” Jack turns to face her, his large hands coming to rest on his hips.

“You didn’t read anything like that?” he repeats loudly and with obvious disbelief, “I thought you read everything he wrote,” Jack fumes, stepping closer to Alana, who steps closer to the glass, as if hoping to put Hannibal between herself and Jack. A guard appears at the door to peer menacingly at Jack through the tiny window. Jack inhales deeply and takes a step back, conscious of the eyes of both Hannibal and the guard on him as he moves.

“I’m sorry, Alana,” he says finally, “that was out of line.”

“Jack,” Alana says placatingly, “I trust Will to share anything important. If Hannibal is telling the truth, I expect we’ll hear from Will any time now,” she says, placing a careful hand on Jack’s arm and glaring at Hannibal around Jack’s broad shoulder. Hannibal raises his eyebrows, but turns back to his desk and sits, taking up his pencil and his book.

Without looking up, he says teasingly, “this shy boy has already seen Will. He already knows his name. Are you chumming the waters, Jack?”

Jack doesn’t flinch at the insinuation. He turns back to the plexiglass barrier and says with no hesitation, “It takes one to catch one.”

Hannibal does look up at this, and all humour is gone from his voice as he says “it takes *two* to catch one.” His eyes are dark, challenging, boring straight into Jack’s.

“Will has never been as effective as he is with you inside his head,” Jack concedes, holding out his hands and spreading his fingers wide. *Your touch, Sir.*

“Oh, I agree,” Hannibal says mildly, “but don't think you can persuade me to play along with appeals to my intellectual vanity.” His tone is casual, but his eyes remain sharp, shark-like, watching for the first swirl of blood in the water.

“I don't think I'll persuade you,” Jack huffs a laugh, “you'll either play or you won't.” He shrugs as much as to say *what can you do?* Hannibal watches him thoughtfully, letting Jack turn to go before he speaks again.

“Bella used to say your face was all scars, if you knew how to look,” Jack turns back again, eyes narrowed and tongue ready with a sharp retort, but he bites his tongue at Hannibal’s shrewd, open, expression.

“There's always room for a few more,” the doctor adds meaningfully, before his tone and expression soften slightly and he says, “how much room does Will have, Jack?”

Jack stares, taken aback by the tenderness he sees in Hannibal’s eyes. This, he knows, will surely complicate things, but it is too late to change his path. Or his plane ticket. Will is the best resource they have now.

Hannibal returns to his note-taking as if he had not spoken. Jack turns away, nods to Alana, and walks through the opened door.

Hannibal raises his eyes to Alana’s in wary gratitude. She nods once, then leaves just as quietly as she came.

***

Will slouches in his uncomfortable plastic chair and sips at his coffee. His hangover has mostly receded, thanks to a long nap in the cab and a greasy grilled cheese sandwich from the terminal canteen. Hannibal’s last letter is in his lap.

Will balls up the paper sack from his sandwich and tosses it into a nearby garbage can. He grabs his duffel and moves to an empty corner of the departure lounge, positioning himself

carefully against the wall and then sliding down to sit on the threadbare carpet.

This letter is longer than the first one; three, four, five pages of creamy paper neatly creased together into thirds, and one separate sheet which Will knows will be another sketch. He places that page to the side and settles back to read.

My Darling Will,

You will know now of the boy who seeks to write his name in blood across our stars.

He knows your name and he was bold enough to whisper it to me, to offer me your blood and that of your wife and child in exchange for his loyalty. I have offered him a compromise of sorts, but it will only keep the wolf from your door for so long, my love. Eventually he will seek you out.

"Christ, Hannibal," Will whispers aloud, "what the fuck have you done?"

He seeks to prove himself, to claim victory over me by pulling my heart from my opened ribcage and sinking in his teeth, drinking my life and becoming all that I am. He does not know that my heart is not mine to surrender.

He believes you are nothing more than a gateway through which he must pass to reach me.

To survive him, you must put away your masks and be only that savage thing that I have seen at the heart of you, that dark soul that delights in death and consumption. Be the fierce thing who devoured me with wine and salt on your lips after our first feast, the bracing richness of your kill still fresh on your tongue.

Will licks his lips and as if by reflex, feels his cock stir. Guiltily, he pushes his knees more tightly together and raises the pages to hide his flushed face.

Behind the shelter of the paper, Will lets his head drop back against the wall. Hannibal's reference to a compromise sits uneasily, and the instinct to return home flares painfully in Will's gut. He checks his watch and sighs; forty-five minutes to go.

Will doesn't need to read the rest of the letter to remember the night he killed Randall Tier. If he closes his eyes he can feel the hot press of Hannibal's body along his spine, Hannibal's cock hard against his ass, his hands gentle as they guide Will's on the scalpel to part flesh from bone.

Randall's ribs were cracked and splintered from the force of Will's blows, the weight of his body and the tight grip of his knees, but his heart was whole and unbruised. Dark blood spilled from the severed arterial connections as they lifted it in their joined hands.

"In ancient times, warriors would open their vanquished foes where they fell and eat their hearts raw, blood still steaming. It was thought that one could absorb the courage and vigour of one's fallen opponent by imbibing their heart's blood." Will can feel the quirk of Hanibal's lip against his jaw and envisions his slight, amused, smile, "I must admit, I prefer to properly prepare it." he adds, guiding Will to place the organ into a glass dish.

Will, enraptured by Hannibal's warm breath on his neck and the mingled scents of blood and arousal that cling to his skin, could only nod.

When Will opens his eyes again his breath is coming in quick pants and his jeans are stretched tight over his erect cock. He shifts restlessly, trying to find a way to hide it, and bites his lip hard at the feeling of damp cloth sliding across his swollen flesh.

Will pulls his coat off and drapes it over his lap, sliding one hand under it to press his palm hard to his crotch. He is debating the merits of slipping away to the men's room when a voice on the PA calls his flight to board and all he can do is stand awkwardly in the line and try to will his body to calm the fuck down.

By the time he takes his seat, Will's thoughts have turned back to blood and snow and the blinding light of the full moon.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

At thy return, if so thou couldst or durst,
Behold a Chaos blacker than the first.

A Love Letter To Her Husband
Anne Bradstreet

Will goes home. Jack takes a trip.

Chapter Notes

Dialogue in this chapter from Hannibal episode 3X08.

I tried to tie this up as neatly and quickly as possible, given that my original plan evolved into a bit of a sprawling mess, plot-wise. Clearly, it hasn't happened quite the way I imagined but I promise you it will get there. Stick with me, kids.

Warning: This chapter contains an explicit het scene, which was unplanned but sort of happened organically between the characters. If it's not your thing (it isn't usually mine) then feel free to skip over it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The cabin is all but empty when Will awakes. He dreamed of Molly and Walter, pale and bloody and still, and his own reflection in the cracked mirrors over their eyes. He dreamed of touching Molly with smoking hands, leaving her flesh black and charred and then fucking her as the skin of his back split open to birth monstrous red wings. His skin is clammy and cold and he has sweated through his shirt. His cock is hard and hot and he turns awkwardly to try to hide the way it presses against his jeans he rummages around his feet for his coat.

On the drive down to the Quays, Will winds down the windows of Molly's little Miata and turns up the stereo. He hums along to The Eagles and sips sweet tea from a takeaway cup. The lights of Miami sink behind him and the road gets rougher as he draws closer to home.

When he pulls into the driveway, the porch light is on and Molly's familiar silhouette is stretched out in an Adirondack chair, feet resting on the rail. Will opens the car door and he can smell smoke from a menthol cigarette.

“When the cat’s away, the mouse will play, huh?” He calls up to her, letting his relief at finding her here and whole show in his voice.

“It’s not as much fun playing alone,” Molly calls back. Will sees her stand and then she is running, jumping clear of the stairs and throwing herself into his arms. She kisses him hard, and her tongue tastes like mint and lime and tobacco. “I missed you, sweet man,” she whispers into his neck, hugging him tight around his waist.

“Missed you, darlin’” Will murmurs into her hair, and he means it. He missed Molly’s easy, uncomplicated affection, her husky voice, and the smell of her shampoo on the pillowcase. And because he finds he means it honestly, Will kisses her again and again and lets her lead him up the stairs to their bed.

When the door closes behind them, he presses her against it and pushes a thigh between her bare brown legs, letting her feel his erection against her hip. Molly slides her hands under his shirt and pushes it off, tossing it to the side. The sea air from the open window is balmy on his bare skin, so different from the knife’s edge of winter on which Baltimore balances. Will’s hands slip from where they are tangled in Molly’s hair along her spine and onto her ass, pulling up the hem of her dress to get a handful of warm, tanned skin. He sinks his fingers into her flesh, kneading gently, and Molly sighs into his mouth.

He kisses a line along her neck, careful to keep his lips over his teeth, following the curve of her chest and pulling the loose neck of her dress aside to lick at a nipple, wide and pink and already hardening. He curls his tongue around it and feels Molly’s breath hitch. Will steps back, shifting Molly’s weight to lean against the door.

“Will?” She asks dreamily, concern creasing her brows, “what’s the matter?”

“Nothing, Mol,” he says truthfully, “not a thing,” because how can there be when she is in front of him, his wife with her shadowy curves that taste of sweat and salt and smoke? Will moves close again and drops gracefully to his knees, relishing the rasp of his jeans over his cock and the smell of slick desire under Molly’s dress. He pushes the thin triangle of her panties to the side and runs his tongue from her cunt to her clit, flattening it out to lap again and again just over the hood where her lips meet, dipping the tip of it in and fluttering carefully against the hard nub there, already swollen.

“Oh,” Molly whispers, sounding almost surprised, “oh, Will.” Then Will sucks her cit between his teeth and there are no more words for long minutes until, as he is fucking her with two curved fingers, pads expertly pressed against her insides just so, she mutters “fuck, fuck, Will, *fuck* ,” and comes, pressing her thighs to the sides of his head and gripping his hair.

He stands, unzips and pushes down his jeans. He lifts her with one broad hand under each thigh and pushes in, slick and easy. He groans her name, calls her *darlin’* and *cherie* and *Mol, shit, oh, Mol* , and then Will can do nothing but breathe and thrust and try to remember not to bite.

They shower together afterwards in the cramped ensuite, cool water sluicing off sweat and sex and travel. They kiss, slowly and sleepily, until Will starts to nod off under the spray and

Molly shepherds him to bed.

Will's sleep is deep and dreamless.

***

Jack arrives the next morning as Will is returning from his run. He stands panting and shirtless on his porch and watches the black SUV crawl up the gravel drive, making no move to greet Jack when he climbs down from the cab. He keeps his face deliberately expressionless as Jack approaches.

"Will Graham," Jack draws out his name, searching for an appropriate greeting. In the end, he settles on "good to see you," which, at least for Will, isn't true at all.

"Jack," Will says without inflection, "what brings you all the way to sunny Florida?" There's not a hint of curiosity in the question; they both know why he's here.

"It *is* beautiful out here, Will," Jack says by way of reply, slipping off his suit coat and sitting down in the same chair from which Molly had greeted Will last night. In his short sleeve shirt and sunglasses, one ankle resting on a knee with feigned casualness, Jack is the very picture of a poorly-disguised narco agent. Will shakes his head.

"I'll go get us a drink," he mutters, and then, looking down at his bare chest, appends awkwardly "and maybe put on a shirt."

"Don't dress up on my account, Graham," Jack laughs as Will steps into the cool of the house.

Will returns ten minutes later, showered and changed, to find Jack leaning on the porch rail, watching the waves. He puts a pitcher of spiked tea and two glasses of ice on the patio table and waves Jack back to his chair. Jack sniffs the pitcher and looks to Will with a raised eyebrow.

"When in Rome, Jack." Will raises his glass and downs half of it, enjoying the way Jack winces. He watches Jack take just a ginger sip from his own glass before placing it down.

"Don't want to talk inside?" Jack surmises shrewdly, peering at Will over his sunglasses, "or you don't want to talk about it here?"

"I don't want to talk about it anywhere," Will corrects him, finishing his drink and pouring another, "it's you who wants to talk, so let's have it. Just don't get out any pictures," he adds sharply, "Molly and Walter will be back soon."

Jack produces a sheaf of notes from his briefcase, carefully removing the paperclipped photos before passing them to Will, who skims them in silence.

"How much do you know?" Jack inquires gently, removing his glasses. Will lets out a long breath and raises his eyes from the paper to meet Jack's.

“Two families killed in their homes, a month apart. Similar circumstances,” Will recites dutifully. He didn’t need Jack’s case notes for that.

“Not ‘similar’,” Jack growls, “the same.” He tosses the pages Will has discarded back into his briefcase, his impatience clear. “You were in the neighbourhood,” He goes on cooly, reaching for the stack of photos, “ever think about giving me a call?”

Oh shit , thinks Will. “Nope,” he replies, lazily popping the bilabial.

Jack tosses the photos on the table in front of Will. The spilled blood, mottled bruising and split blue skin seem revoltingly vivid in the hazy Southern sunshine. “You know what it is,” he hisses at Will, disgusted.

Will leans forward in his chair.

“I didn't call you,” he enunciates carefully, “because I didn't want to.” Jack is coiled in his chair, mouth open, ready to snap. “I don't think I'd be all that useful to you, Jack,” Will continues in the same measured tone. “I never think about it anymore,” he lies easily, “I don't believe I could do it now.”

It’s bullshit, and they both know it.

The side gate squeaks and both men turn to see Molly and Walter walking up from the back beach track. They wave, and Will waves back. At the site of Jack, Molly leans down to whisper in Walter’s ear and they head around the side of the house. Jack waits until he hears the splash of the outdoor shower before he pulls two more snapshots from his pocket.

Two family portraits; big smiles with white teeth, neat hair, happy eyes.

“All dead.” Jack spits through gritted teeth.

Will stares at the photos and tries to forget what those smiling faces look like bloodied and bruised, with mirrors for eyes.

“This freak seems to be in phase with the moon. Killed the Jacobis,” Jack pauses and taps one of the portraits, “in Chicago almost four weeks ago. Full moon. Killed the Leeds family,” he gestures to the other picture, “in Buffalo, night before last. One day short of a lunar month.”

Will recalls cold, crisp, snow under his bare feet and the dazzle of mirrors in the moonlight. He turns his gaze back to Jack and he knows his horror must be plainly written on his face.

“Three weeks,” Will whispers, “before he does it again.”

Jack nods and takes a deep swallow of his drink. Will refills both their glasses and they sit in silence for long minutes, watching the tide come in.

“I’ll need to talk to Molly and Walter,” Will says finally, “and I’m going to have to bill you.”

***

Will puts a bookmark into *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and reaches over to turn off the lamp.

“G’night, *bebette* , don’t let the ‘gators bite,” he chants as he pulls the cotton coverlet up over Walter. He waits until the boy has settled on his side before rising to leave.

“Night, dad,” comes the quiet reply out of the dark, and Will has to bite his lip against the guilty ache in his heart. He closes the door and sags against the corridor wall. He thinks of the Jacobis and Leeds reading bedtime stories, kissing their children goodnight, and then waking to pain and blood. For a moment, Will feels like he might cry.

From the kitchen comes the clink of glass on glass and the familiar sound of Molly’s tuneless humming. Will blinks away the tears yet to fall and wipes a hand over his face before heading downstairs.

Molly greets him at the last step with a kiss and a glass of whiskey. She takes his arm and leads him outside to the porch, where they perch in their usual chairs. She lights two cigarettes and passes him one, then they sit side-by-side and smoke, and listen to the scream of the katy-dids.

Eventually, Molly asks quietly, “How bad is it gonna be if you stay here and read about the next one?”

Will stays stubbornly silent, but she presses on, louder. “If you stay here and there's more killing, maybe it'd sour this place for you. *High Noon* and all that.”

“Do you want me to go?” He knows she doesn’t.

Molly sighs, choosing her words carefully before speaking again.

“I'd have the satisfaction that you did the right thing. He kills *families* , Will,” she stresses, standing. She paces slowly, backwards and forwards in front of his chair. “No one knows how he chooses them. What if he chose us?” She asks at last, voice cracking. She pivots on one heel and stares at Will, eyes shining wetly in the low light.

“Don't say that,” Will pleads gently. “If I go…” he wavers, wondering how to finish his thought in a way that won’t frighten her. In the end, he says weakly, “I'll be different when I get back.”

He doesn’t say *if I get back* .

“I won't,” Molly whispers vehemently. Then she leans down to kiss him and they don’t talk anymore.

***

Will leaves the next morning before sunrise. He kisses Molly and Walter, still sleeping, silent goodbyes.

Stuffed to the bottom of his satchel are Hannibal's letters, the key wallet, the locket, and all of the cash, cards and documents Will took from the safe. The rings are in his pocket, and he can feel them through the cloth like a brand against his thigh.

***

The Leeds home is dark and cold, life on eternal pause. Standby lights and digital readouts, green and white and blue, cast diffuse light over acres of shining floorboards. There are plates in the sink and a bottle of milk, open and empty, on the island bench.

Upstairs, the landing is a study nook with books open on the timber worktables, laptops still plugged in and humming, noteboards covered in scrawled, childish letters and sparkling stickers. The bedroom door is open and Will can just see the feet of two twin beds in the light from the digital clock. He thinks about Wally and feels nauseous.

Will turns away from the children's bedroom, and heads to the master suite. The curtains are open and by the light of the waxing moon Will can see wide swathes of blood: on the beadhead, fine spatter from gunshot wounds and on the walls gaudy arterial spray, thickly curved and dripping. There are smudged pools and drag marks by the baseboard where the killer positioned the audience to witness his finale.

Will stands over the blood-soaked bed and lets the pendulum swing; lets his monster revel in the feel of the gun in his hand, the smell of cordite and the weight of wings unfurling as he touches Mrs Leeds' golden skin. His touch awakens her, blesses her, *changes* her.

He can see himself in her eyes.

***

It's late when Will checks in. He showers first, scouring his skin until it reddens and the smell of death has been replaced by hard water and the perfumed tang of hotel soap. He towels off and then digs through his bag for boxers. The clean cotton smells comfortingly like laundry soap and salt air.

Will perches on the bed with a glass of whiskey, poured generously from a new bottle acquired on his way from the crime scene. The aftertaste is mostly a burn, but he drains the glass quickly and pours out another, breathing out slowly as his thoughts start to grow distant. He picks up his cell and thinks about calling Molly, but in the end puts it back down because her softness and her sweet voice have no place here, when Will's head is full of blood and death and golden light.

Instead, Will goes back to his satchel and rifles through until he finds the last envelope from Hannibal. He pulls out the folded sketch and drops the rest of the pages on the nightstand. Dropping to the bed, Will unfolds the drawing.

It's a triptych. In the top left corner is a detailed sketch of a hand - his own - the knuckles swollen, nails ragged, fingers bloodied and grazed with a smudged suggestion of bruising. It's submerged up to the wrist in rippling water, bare suggestions of steam curling from the surface and obscuring his arm where it disappears out of the rounded frame. Will's fingers

are held loosely in the grip of another hand, darker and larger than his own, with gracefully tapered fingers and neatly squared nails. A second hand grasps Will's wrist, long fingers easily circling his radius and ulna. Will remembers the unnatural and always-unexpected warmth of those hands, the tenderness of touch at odds with the knowledge that they could snap his bones. He remembers the taste of salt on those fingers when they slipped between his lips.

In the top right, in another neat, rounded frame, Will's hand holds a scalpel. Battered flesh gives slightly under the pressure of the blade and then parts, spilling dark blood from an opening wound. Will's knuckles are taped and dressed, but there is a fine mist of fresh blood covering the back of his hand. He was breathless and shaking and pressed too hard, cut too deep. Blood had burst from the skin like juice from a ripe fruit and Will had felt Hannibal's chest, pressed tightly to his own back, quivering with a suppressed laugh. Will had elbowed him in the side, but Hannibal had just seized his wrists and whispered laughingly in his ear *there's plenty of time for slap and tickle once we are finished, my darling* .

Sprawling across the bottom third of the page is a lovingly detailed study of the scar across Will's belly. Smoothly highlighted, jagged and curving and raised from his skin by subtle shading and soft lines, it is bracketed at either end by Hannibal's fingers. His thumbs reach up towards Will's ribcage and his pinkies are stretched towards the hollows of Will's hips, disappearing into shadows where the hair on his belly thickens towards his cock, just out of frame.

Hannibal's fingers had pressed so tightly it had left bruises fanned out across Will's torso; peacock feathers in blue and grey and amethyst. Will had pressed his own fingers against them the next night when he jerked off in the shower, letting the pain bring back the feel of Hannibal's sweat-slick body holding him down against the dark wood of the dining table. But the scar hadn't been there that night, the night they had eaten Randall Tier. Hannibal can't bear to remember Will without that deeply carved reminder of his forgiveness.

Will palms himself absently through his boxer shorts, first gently then pushing harder, remembering rutting against the curved edge of the table as Hannibal dropped to his knees behind him, spreading him apart with both hands.

Will had expected the familiar nudge of Hannibal's finger but instead came the soft wet warm slide of his tongue in long licks, wide and flat from behind Will's balls right up to the top, slow and deliberate and filthy. Hannibal pulled back and Will followed, pushing helplessly against Hannibal's palms. Hannibal tutted quietly, holding Will in place with one hand while he reached up to the table with the other.

"Patience, my love," he crooned, and then Will felt something cool drip where just moments before had been Hannibal's warm mouth. Oil, Will realised as Hannibal spread it with his fingers and it began to warm. His tongue returned, pushing into Will and licking him open.

"Fuck, Hannibal, you - oh *God* ," Will had groaned, losing his thought all together when Hannibal had finally thrust two fingers into him. The stretch was fast and just on the other side of painful but the burn was lost in pleasure when Will felt the wet swirl of Hannibal's tongue around his fingers, licking in as the muscle stretched open.

Will is rocking against his hand and his boxers are damp with precum under his sweaty palm. He draws his cock out through the flies and groans at the first feel of his hand on bare skin. Too impatient to wait, Will spits into his palm and swirls his hand over the head of his cock, mixing spit and precum and using it to smooth his fast, tight strokes.

Will had wondered distantly whether he should worry about some sort of cross-contamination, kissing Hannibal straight after being eaten out. In the end, he decided that if anyone would know the risk it would *be* Hannibal and he didn't seem at all concerned. His tongue tasted a little like musky sweat and a lot like olive oil and it was … *oh shit* , licking over the old bruises on Will's neck and shoulders, sketching tiny circles as Hannibal bit into the tendon behind Will's ear. His fingers skated down Will's sides, turning him again, finding each bruise and scrape from his fight with Randall Tier and digging in his nails until Will hisses and bucks.

Will digs the nails of his left hand into his thigh, watching dark crescents bloom. His strokes are shorter now, punishingly tight, and each one kindles a spark. His hips strain upwards, back arching from the bed, thighs tight.

Hannibal had pushed in quickly and the blunt burn, even with the slickness of the oil, had startled Will. "Fuck, oh, *fuck!* "

"Yes," Hannibal had gasped against Will's jaw, "that was the general idea."

Will couldn't do more than gasp and breathe. He drew great gulps of air that when exhaled, became increasingly frenzied groans, almost embarrassingly high pitched and desperate.

"Please," he whispered in between breaths, "Please, *Hannibal* ," even though Will was no longer sure what he was asking for.

Hannibal reached up to Will's lips, rubbing his lower lip gently until Will opened his mouth and eagerly drew three fingers into his mouth, laving them with his tongue and sucking at the tips. After a few moments, Hannibal withdrew from Will's mouth and slipped his wet hand in between Will and the table, taking a firm grip on Will's cock. He stroked from root to tip, twisting a little over the head; once, twice, three times and Will was coming hot over Hannibal's hand.

It's the memory of Hannibal's pained groan and how his fingers had dug into Will's hips that finally sets Will off. His orgasm is long, an agonisingly drawn-out thread of pleasure, hot and wet high up his chest and over his belly.

Will wipes himself off with a flannel in the cramped bathroom, then returns to the bed and finally turns back the covers. With a grimace, he kicks aside his boxers and climbs between the rough sheets. Despite his fatigue and the creeping drowsiness that follows his orgasm, sleep is a long time coming. The bed feels empty, as if the sheets beside him are waiting for another body.

At last, Will's limbs grow heavy and his breathing slows. The night passes in a blur of shadowy dreams and blurry awakenings, punctuated by unfamiliar noises, and once, the sound of footsteps outside his window.

Chapter End Notes

Bebette is a cajun word meaning ‘critter’ or ‘monster’.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

At thy return, if so thou couldst or durst,
Behold a Chaos blacker than the first.

Hannibal receives a long-awaited visitor. Will dreams a dream.

Chapter Notes

Holy buggering hell this thing is still not finished. Huge thanks to those who have stuck with me as the updates have slowed down and the great sprawling octopus of my plot has slowly expanded.

I'm not making any more promises as to the length but I don't plan for this to go much beyond the canon timeline, so we must be nearly there. Nevertheless, the chapter count has gone up again.

Some dialogue from Hannibal episode 3X09, bent slightly to fit my canon-divergent requirements.

Title from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* by Anne Bradstreet.

In the morning, Will wakes with a headache. He makes an instant coffee at the tiny sink and drinks it while he reviews the Jacobi case notes. The investigator's notes are brief and clinical, blood types and spatter patterns and liver temperatures that reveal nothing of the blinding golden light behind the killer's eyes and the photos, while gruesome, reveal only the same macabre tableau that Will observed at the Leeds crime scene.

Hannibal, Will thinks, would have known just what to say to spark Will's ability to weave together all the scattered threads he had observed at the scene. He knew what paths Will's mind would follow, what associations it would make and what it had hidden away. *I was never more myself than I was with you* .

"Fat lot of good you do me in the fucking nuthouse, Hannibal." Will says out loud, as if in renunciation of his own mawkish thoughts. "You were right, though," he continues in the same cheerful, slightly manic tone, "at least I know where to find you. *If* I need you."

The coffee is nauseatingly acidic and the taste sticks in Will's throat, cloying and corrosive. He leaves the last cooling inch on the table and takes a swig from the whiskey bottle instead to chase away the lingering vile burn of the coffee and then another to wash down three Aspirin.

Will showers and dresses: shirt, tie, buttoned sweater. He hesitates over his glasses and eventually compromises and slips them into his pocket, nestled next to the pouch holding Hannibal's locket and rings from the safe. He slings his satchel over his shoulder and takes another swig of whiskey on his way out the door.

Hannibal's Land Rover is parked outside but Will bypasses it in favour of calling a cab. He spends the cab ride crunching mints and mentally rehearsing his conversation with Jack. Jack isn't going to accept that Will needs time; they both know that the full moon is coming and time is running out. After the total clusterfuck that was Abel Gideon's escape, he and Alana will be extremely wary of involving Hannibal. Perhaps, Will muses, if he made it seem like it was all Jack's idea… Probably not, he decides. *That sort of manipulation was always your gift, wasn't it?*

The driver pulls over on the opposite side of the street. Will climbs out into the cool air and stands still for a moment, trying to quash the fear that his very presence in the building will set off some sort of alarm. Maybe if he just decides here and now to put a stop to this nonsense, drop the case and go home, the fear and anxiety will disappear and the beast inside Will that has been woken by the smell of blood and letters filled with memories will go back to sleep. Again, probably not. Definitely fucking not.

Alright , Will decides abruptly, forcing his legs to feet to move, *so just go in there and lay it out . A leads to B, leads to C. You want to stop a murder, so you need me. I want to see a killer, so I need Hannibal.* He strides up the stairs to the front doors, muttering to himself, testing the words.

"Jack I need to see *Hannibal* . Jack, I *need* to see Hannibal. Jack, I need to *see* Hannibal." Will reaches the elevator bank, takes a deep breath and steps in.

I need you .

***

Jack is quiet while Will recounts his impressions of the repositioned bodies, the mirrors and the killer's overwhelming sense of righteousness and conviction when he touched Mrs Jacobi. *Changed* her. He doesn't talk about the class notes or the twin beds; he knows that Jack understands.

Will does ask about the Jacobis' dog. Mostly, he wonders why it didn't wake anyone up when it scented a stranger.

Jack digs up a printout from his 'In' tray. "Last night, a vet called the police," he reads, "Leeds and his oldest boy brought it into the vet the afternoon before they were killed. I'll put someone on contacting vets in the Jacobis' area." Will takes the offered page and scans it quickly.

“What’s going to happen to it?” Will asks, “the dog, I mean. Not the vet,” he clarifies awkwardly.

Jack raises an eyebrow at Will, but all he says is “please don't worry about the dog”.

“What do you expect me to do?” Will asks, as much as to say *you knew who you were fucking hiring, you asshole, and he cares about dogs goddammit*.

“Best you can, that's all,” Jack says a little more gently, then “busywork's been a narcotic for me sometimes, especially after I quit the booze. For you too, I think.”

Who’s quitting booze? Will thinks indignantly. The very idea is slightly horrifying, especially right now. He then realises that Jack probably isn’t intimating that Will should quit drinking, rather that he might be facing some more personal demons in ‘returning to the scene of the crime’, as it were. He’s not entirely wrong, but it isn’t work Will needs.

“There's something else I can do,” Will says cautiously, deliberately keeping his tone bland, “I can wait until I'm driven to it by desperation in the last days before the full moon. Or I could do it now, while it might be of some use.”

Jack looks at him steadily, eyes narrowed. “Is there an opinion you want, Will?

Will pretends to ponder the question to buy time to frame his response. Finally, he says, consideringly, “A mindset I need to recover.” Jack looks at him expectantly over the top of his reading glasses. *Time to play your hand, Graham.*

“I have to see Hannibal.”

***

The hospital corridors are lit by flickering, humming fluorescent lights that cause Will’s vision to shimmer at the edges like a migraine aura. He breathes slowly, deeply, trying to remain calm, but the air tastes of disinfectant and stale urine and a bitter base-note of fear and horror that no improvement in administration will ever erase. Will’s heart races and the old fear of being imprisoned, being *examined* , rises in him. He’s sweating.

He wipes his face with his handkerchief and turns his focus to his feet; one foot in front of the other, a steady rhythm of soft soles against linoleum. His eyes and his mind start to relax, and the humming of the lights drops away...

...replaced by the click of Will’s shoes against old tile and the quiet mutter of faraway prayer. When the spectre of death appears beneath his feet, Will looks up. The interior of the Cappella Palatina is dim; the high golden roof drinks the candlelight and returns only the echo of his own footsteps. At the transepts, a silhouette waits. Will makes his way up the nave with a slow, measured tread. He speaks his greeting with a steady calm that he does not feel.

“Hello Doctor Lecter.”

Hannibal turns to face the glass. His shoulders are stiff and his legs are tensed, almost trembling with the desire to run towards Will. Instead, he places his book onto the bed and stands slowly, taking the opportunity to hide his shaking hands behind his back. With a smile, says simply, "Hello Will."

Then, taking a deep breath in through his nose, "You've changed your aftershave."

Will cocks an eyebrow but otherwise remains deliberately impassive. "I had it on good authority that the one I used to wear was atrocious."

"What a pity," Hannibal says after a beat, "I fear I had grown fond of it."

They are standing face to face; close enough that if not for the glass between them, Will knows he would be able to smell the warm salt of Hannibal's skin and the fine, clean scent of his shaving soap. It would be enough, Will thinks, to finish the job of driving him completely fucking crazy. *At least I'm in the right place for it* , he muses bitterly.

Hannibal's hair is shorter and silver has overtaken ash and wheat. The faint lines around his eyes have deepened and his complexion is muted olive where he used to shine like burnished gold. His shoulders are still broad and despite the unflattering jumpsuit, Will can see the strength of his torso and the strong lines of muscle on his thighs. He wishes he could see his hands but Hannibal keeps them tucked behind his back, standing at rest to let Will appraise him. *Do I still please you?*

Hannibal, in return, drops his gaze very obviously to Will's mouth before travelling over his neck, his shoulders and his chest. It lingers around his stomach, and Will knows, in his mind, he is tracing the jagged curve of Will's scar. Hannibal's eyes move quickly over his wedding ring and then slow down in frank appreciation of his hips and thighs. Will lets himself smile a little.

"Are you finished?" he asks softly. Hannibal humms absently in reply, but when he looks up at Will through his lashes, his eyes are dark and sharp.

"Did you get my letters?" His voice is steady, and nobody but Will would have heard the hope blooming beneath the words. Will's palms itch and he tucks his hands into his pockets to keep from touching the glass. His fingertips in his right pocket find soft velvet. He strokes it, gently feeling out the shape of the rings with his index finger.

"I did," Will says, just as cooly. Then he adds "Thank you," with a curve of his lip that he knows Hannibal will understand for a smile.

"Did you read them?" Hannibal asks mildly, "Or did you simply toss them into the nearest fire?"

"I read them," Will replies, "and then I burned them." It's not entirely a lie; he *did* burn one of the letters. It's only a lie for the security recording, anyway. Hannibal will know the truth.

"And you came anyway." Hannibal claps his hand together with child-like pleasure, then steeples his fingers as he continues, "I'm glad you came. My other callers are all professional.

Banal psychiatrists and grasping second-raters. Pencil-lickers trying to protect their tenure with pieces in the journals." He grimaces, a there-and-gone expression of distaste for the gauche grasping of his erstwhile peers and colleagues. Will snorts audibly; he has read both Chilton's sensationalist tome and his only-slightly-less-sensationalist essay on emotional synthesis and psychopathy.

They will find time one day to share notes on Chilton's wrecking-ball style of psychiatry, but for now he needs to stick to the script.

"I want you to help me, Dr. Lecter." Will's tone is dry and lazy. The request is a formality; Hannibal already knows why he's here.

"Yes, I thought so," Hannibal says amused, then adds curiously, "are we no longer on a first-name basis?"

Will feels like his mouth is full of nothing but Hannibal's name and if he says it out loud then all the other words hiding behind it will come tumbling out like the tide spilling over the levee. He bites his tongue until he tastes blood and swallows until the words are lodged just under his breastbone.

"Right now," he grits out instead, "I'm more comfortable the less personal we are."

Hannibal gazes at Will in a way that makes him certain Hannibal can read every word that he didn't say. He feels naked and opened up with all the secrets carved into his heart and his bones on full display. He crosses his arms over his chest.

Hannibal breathes in again and narrows his eyes. "I smell dogs and diesel and salt beneath your aftershave. Do your wife and son enjoy sailing?"

Will ignores the hurt underlying Hannibal's words. There is nothing he can say here and now and frankly, untangling the threads of their conversation is starting to give him a headache.

"I'm here about Chicago and Buffalo," he announces abruptly. "You've read about it, I'm sure."

"I've read the papers," Hannibal confirms, "I can't clip them. They won't let me have scissors, of course," he says, waving one hand in the direction of his desk as if to invite Will to behold his lack of scissors. "You want to know how he's choosing them," he adds airily. He is not addressing Will now, but rather the poorly-concealed camera above Will's right shoulder. He knows that Jack is watching.

Will waves the manilla folder he is carrying, trying to break Hannibal's virtual stand-off with Jack through the camera lens. "Thought you would have some ideas."

Hannibal glances at the folder then raises his eyes very deliberately to Will's.

"You just came here to look at me," he hisses, spreading his hands wide. *See what my love has made of me? Are you looking, my darling?*

“Came to get the old scent again,” Hannibal croons. He moves closer to the glass and Will sees his lips part and his nostrils flare, just slightly. Will licks his lips in subconscious mimicry and wonders what Hannibal can smell from him now. Will he understand Will’s fear? Hear the words lodged in Will’s throat? *Please, oh God, please.* Hannibal’s eyes widen almost imperceptibly and Will feels weak with relief.

“Why don't you just smell yourself?” *You want what I want, and now I know it.* Will lets out a breath he hadn’t realised he was holding. When he speaks again, he doesn’t need to pretend amusement at Hannibal’s rather crude outburst.

“I expected more of you, doctor. That routine is old hat.”

“Whereas you are a new man,” Hannibal returns lazily. *Associations come quickly* , Will remembers. “Are you a good father, Will?”

Will’s stomach sinks at the reminder of his family, but the jab doesn’t hurt the way it should. His love for them seems distant, like the nostalgic love you feel when grief has passed. It was only two days ago he kissed Molly on their porch, but it feels like years and Will is already becoming a different man. He knows Hannibal is watching for his reaction, waiting to see where his blow has landed, but Will can’t summon up anything more than to tiredly rub at his eyes. He needs another coffee. Or more whiskey.

“Let me have the file,” Hannibal continues abruptly. “An hour, and we can discuss it like old times.”

There is a secure slot set into the window off to Will’s left. Hannibal makes his way over and waits patiently a short distance from the tray, posed obediently with his hands by his sides and in full view of the cameras. Will pushes the folder through until it rests entirely on the tray and then closes the slot on his side. Hannibal picks up the file but does not immediately open it.

“Thank you.” Will says, and he means it. Hannibal’s lips quirk in a quick, subtle smile.

“Family values may have declined over the last century, but we still help our families when we can,” Hannibal inclines his head, then adds softly, “you're family, Will.”

Will nods stiffly, not trusting himself to speak. It’s nearly as hard to meet Hannibal’s eyes now as it was upon their first meeting, but he forces himself to look up for a brief moment. Hannibal’s eyes are soft, clear hazel in the filtered glow from the skylight and for an instant, Will could swear he smells wax and candle smoke. He breathes out and the illusion is gone.

As he turns to leave, he hears the scrape of Hannibal’s chair followed by a soft shuffling of paper. He doesn’t look back.

***

“This is a very shy boy, Will. I'd love to meet him.” Hannibal says without preamble when Will re-enters the visitors’ room. He is standing above his desk with his hands clasped neatly behind his back and suddenly, Will is tumbling back in time. They are in Hannibal’s office,

facing each other across the broad expanse of his desk. The cameras and the glass wall seem very far away.

“I'm sure you would.” Will remarks blandly. Hannibal continues as if Will had not spoken.

“Have you considered the possibility that he's disfigured? Or that he may believe he's disfigured?” He asks off-handedly, prowling from his desk and moving to the window. He turns from Will to gaze down at the street, or whatever view he has placed there in his mind.

“That's interesting,” Will mutters distractedly, trying to see past Hannibal to the window.

“That's not interesting,” Hannibal states dismissively, “you thought of that before.” Will nods unnecessarily. If the killer had only wanted a handful of mirror shards to build his tableau, he needed only to break one but in each case, every mirror in the house had been shattered.

“He only wants to see himself through their eyes; Mrs Jacobi and Mrs Leeds and their families.”

“Could you see yourself in their eyes, Will? Killing them all?” Hannibal asks in a low voice. He is standing face-to-face with Will, close enough for Will to smell his cologne and feel the brush of his lapels against his own shirt. “Close your eyes, Will,” he whispers.

Will closes his eyes. When he opens them, he is in the Jacobis’ master bedroom. The bedside lamps reflect sparkling spots of light from the mirror shards positioned over the eyes of each body lined up against the wall and from the glittering pieces in the rug.

“The first small bond to the killer itches and stings like a leech,” Hannibal says from behind Will. Together they turn to the full-length mirror visible through the open door of the walk-in. Pieces of their faces reflect, refract, crack and merge in the spiderwebbing fractures.

“Like you, Will,” Hannibal murmurs into his ear, “he needs a family to escape what's inside him.”

Hannibal holds Will in place with an arm at his waist and together they watch the splintered pieces of themselves fall from the frame.

***

Will leaves the hospital at a jog, eager to clear the distinctive and oppressive olfactory atmosphere from his nose. He stands under an oak tree at the edge of the carpark and takes long draughts of clean air. He does not think about Hannibal now, not here, while it’s still close and raw. He tucks the memories safely, content in the knowledge that he can revisit each moment once he is alone.

Instead, Will thinks about the evidence folder under his arm. After their surreal trip through Will’s memories of the Jacobi crime scene, Hannibal had confidently identified the families’ happy lives as their victim profile. He was certain that the killer was searching for a readymade family into which he could insert himself and see himself reflected. The next victims would be another picture-perfect family whose home offered privacy and protection

to shield the killer from prying eyes while he carried out his ritual. *It could be anyone* , Will thought hopelessly. There were hundreds of thousands of families just in the South East, never mind the rest of the fucking country. Will thinks uneasily of his own family, smiling and obliviously trusting in their cabin on the cay. *Anyone* .

***

Will sleepwalks through his debrief with Jack, feeling almost drunk with exhaustion and the residual rawness of his meeting with Hannibal. Jack is unimpressed with Hannibal's revelations regarding their victim profile.

"Gee, Will, that really narrows it down." He sneers without looking up from his laptop. Then, more gently, "got a call from the Leeds' vet. He said it looked like the dog had been stabbed with a narrow blade like a letter opener or an icepick. I've sent a couple of cadets to pick it up."

"Is it-" Will begins, gesturing abortively when he can't decide to ask *alive* or *dead* .

"Vet says she'll recover." Jack confirms. He snorts, then adds, "It's lucky you found the only other person on the planet who is crazy about dogs as you are. Now," he intones sternly, "go and get some rest. You look like shit."

***

Will dreams himself standing naked beneath the stark silvery light of a full moon. The air is clear and crisp and so cold that his breath smokes and curls of steam seem to rise from his bare skin. A hand grasps Will's and he turns to see Hannibal, silhouetted against bare trees that rise behind him like twining antlers. Hannibal lifts Will's hand and places it on his chest. His skin is scorching hot and Will jerks backward with a moan, leaving behind a glistening black handprint directly over Hannibal's heart.

They kiss; a rough collision of teeth and tongues that tastes of iron and ash. Hannibal pulls Will into an embrace, burning him where they touch. Will feels the prick of Hannibal's canines against his neck, then his collarbone, and then over his own heart. Blood pours forth from the bites in a dark torrent. Will watches in fascination as the dark tide sweeps over the snow beneath their feet. In its wake it leaves the sprawling, monstrous corpse of a beast.

The creature's wings are broken and bent and it bleeds sluggishly from dozens of wounds. Its throat has been torn out and its insides are dark as ink in the white glow of the moon.

Hannibal twines around Will, caging him with clinging limbs. He whispers in his ear, his accent thick and voice rough with desire, "have you ever seen blood in the moonlight, Will? It appears quite black."

Will wakes still licking his lips to chase the taste of blood and grinding his hips into the mattress. He is painfully hard, balanced on the knife-edge of orgasm. Without opening his eyes, Will slides his right hand between his cock and the mattress and tightens his fingers around his shaft. He comes quickly and messily; ejaculate hot and wet on his hands and soaking into his pants and underwear.

Will showers, changes, and throws a dry towel over the slight dampness on the sheets. Despite the sweet heaviness in his body, he lies awake for a long time, trying to recall the shape of the beast from his dream.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Wish I knew what you were looking for
I might have known what you would find

Under the Milky Way, The Church

Will and Hannibal return to the front page, the Red Dragon makes a phone call, and the author condenses a lot of action into one chapter.

Chapter Notes

This story is first and foremost a love story. The plot is mixed in with canon elements to give context, but it's not a true canon remix and so most of the canon events will happen off-screen. We'll really only see Will and Hannibal's story from here.

Some dialogue from Hannibal episodes 3X07, 3X09 & 3x10 bent slightly to fit my canon-divergent requirements.

Title from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* by Anne Bradstreet.

"Bitch!" Will hisses, then ducks his head sheepishly upon realising the elderly couple at the next table are staring at him. He turns away from them and burrows deeper into the corner of his booth then bends to pick up his tablet from under the table, where he'd swept it in a fit of childish pique.

The screen is still lit and the bold headline reads *INSANE FIEND CONSULTED IN MASS MURDERS BY AGENT HE TRIED TO KILL* . Beneath it is a picture of Hannibal after his arrest, pinned against a patrol car by a state trooper. His face is turned away, recognisable only in profile, but the cuts and bruises that were souvenirs of their trip to Verger Farms are livid and obvious against his olive complexion. Hannibal is cuffed but his back and shoulders are straight.

He didn't fight , Jack had said afterwards. Will hadn't watched, couldn't watch any more after Hannibal had gone to his knees in the dark of Will's yard.

Next to the picture of Hannibal, there is a picture of Will himself taken only the day before outside the hospital. His face is closed, his jaw tense, and his hair a complete disaster. He is

framed neatly under the words CRIMINALLY INSANE as they appear carved into the bluestone arch above the hospital doors. *Fucking bitch* .

Will stuffs his tablet into his satchel and leaves his cold coffee and a handful of dollar bills on the table. Outside the diner he turns his collar up against the wind. The Land Rover is parked around the back of the roadhouse but he leaves it for now and crosses the highway on foot. At the gas station on the other side, Will pays in cash for a newspaper, a coffee, and another prepaid cell phone. He puts the phone in his pocket and with the newspaper under one arm, walks along beside the highway until he is out of sight of the gas station and then crosses back to the roadhouse.

He gives the coffee and the newspaper to a panhandler outside the diner, dropping his change into the man's hat.

"Hey, thanks man!" The panhandler calls to Will's retreating back. Will raises a hand in reply but doesn't turn around. He catches a glimpse of the man contentedly sipping his coffee as he eases the Land Rover out onto the highway.

***

Will isn't surprised at all when he finds the blind hidden in a stand of trees at the edge of the Jacobis' yard. He carefully bags an apple core and a cigarette butt, holding the bags delicately between two fingers as he perches on a fallen log. A slim birch to his right bears a raw, weeping circle where a branch has recently been cut away, opening a window in the foliage to reveal a clear view of the house.

A patch of bark has been scraped from the older tree on Will's left and a symbol has been carved into the exposed wood; a rectangle split by a vertical line. The cuts are deep and neat and even, done by a steady hand wielding a sharp blade. Will snaps a picture with his phone.

I sat here , he thinks as he closes his eyes, *and I watched them* . In his mind, Will hears the soft chatter of a camera aperture. *I filmed them, stalked them like-*

Will is drawn from his meditations suddenly by a bright flash against his eyelids. There's another flash as he opens his eyes and he is momentarily dazzled but as the white spots resolve, he sees a flash of red by the gate at the side of the yard. Will grabs the evidence bags and runs.

He intercepts Freddie just as she is setting one shoe in the wire, preparing to pull herself over the gate. She drops gracefully back to the ground and turns, coyly tugging at her skirt. Her eyes go straight to the bags in his hand.

"Are you just keeping America clean or is that evidence?" Will pushes the bags into his coat pocket and ignores her question.

Instead, he says, "you're trespassing, Freddie."

"I was trespassing before the blood dried," Freddie says cooly. "When did they call you in?"

“I'm *not* talking to you.” Will squares his shoulders, hoping to look firmly resolved instead of tired and slightly overwhelmed.

“We're co-conspirators, Will,” Freddie cajoles sweetly, “I died for you and your cause.” She raises one perfectly pencilled eyebrow, obviously expecting her *quid pro quo* in the form of Will’s cooperation. Will wonders how well-aligned her eyebrows would appear once her face was flensed from her skull and mounted on pins.

“You didn't die enough,” he grows, considering the exact shade of red matte board to complement her skin tone. Freddie presses her lips together but remains wisely silent.

“You came into my hospital room while I was asleep,” Will continues in a low tone, “you flipped back the sheets and shot a picture of my temporary colostomy bag.” He can muster up a temper over it now, but in the wake of Abigail’s death and Hannibal’s fucking *elopment* with Bedelia, the insult of Will’s literal shit splashed across the pages of *Tattlecrime* had barely registered.

“Covered your junk with a black box,” Freddie replies crisply, then adds in a frighteningly lecherous way, “a *big* black box.” A pause, waiting for Will to speak, then, “you're welcome.”

Will bites his lip to keep from inviting Freddie to perform distasteful acts on his big black box. Instead he says, “You called Hannibal and I *murder husbands* .” That had hurt the most, having their secrets exposed by Freddie fucking Lounds. Seeing the intimacy they had shared reduced to a catchphrase to be printed on mugs and t-shirts.

“You *did* run off to Europe together,” Freddie says pointedly, and Will wonders for a minute if that really is all that she knows. “And you paid him a visit. Before you lie,” she tuts, “know that I know that you did.”

“Good-bye, Freddie,” Will says tiredly, turning to walk away. He’s burning daylight trading barbs with Freddie Lounds when he should already be on his way back to Baltimore to make his arranged visit with Hannibal.

“If you're smart,” Freddie calls back to Will, “you'd use me. All psychopaths are narcissists. They love to read about themselves.” She means the Tooth Fairy, Will realises. Of course, that was why she was here. He doesn’t look back, but he does think about it on his drive back to Baltimore.

***

“The character appears on a mahjongg piece, marking the Red Dragon,” Hannibal explains without raising his eyes from the pictures. It’s not hard to imagine Hannibal playing mahjongg in the park with the little old Chinese ladies. He’d smile, pour tea, and trade barbs in flawless Mandarin and Cantonese. It’s an oddly wholesome image.

"And behold a great red dragon..." Hannibal says dreamily, drawing Will’s attention back to the present. He gives Hannibal his full attention once again, but refrains from speaking until the full idea is made clear.

“Are you familiar with William Blake's *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun* ?” Hannibal asks Will, one finger still tracing the character in the photograph. “Blake's Dragon stands over a pleading woman caught in the coil of its tail,” he continues, raising his eyes to Will’s, “few images in Western art radiate such a unique and nightmarish charge of demonic sexuality.”

Sounds like someone I know , Will reflects before he can stop the idea from forming. Half a beat behind that thought comes the recollection of Mrs Jacobi at the moment of her death (*changing*) with her skin gilded and glowing and Will’s majesty reflected in the splintered mirrors of her eyes, and he understands the design.

“The man who killed the Jacobis and the Leedses,” Hannibal goes on, “saw something in them that drew him and drove him to do it. He chose them because something in them spoke to him. The Jacobis were the first to help him, the first to lift him into the Glory of his Becoming. The Jacobis were better than anything he knew.”

“Until the Leedses.” Will adds.

Hannibal inclines his head - *you see it now, don’t you?* - and continues, “as the Dragon grows in strength and Glory, there are more families to come.” *More families like yours* , he doesn’t say. Will hears it anyway and wonders what it will cost him to protect Molly and Walter from Hannibal’s jealousy. Whether it is even possible to stop what Freddie and Hannibal have unknowingly conspired to set into motion.

“I envy the Dragon his certainty. The idea of family,” Will pauses, struggles to find the words he needs Hannibal to hear, “of *belonging* , is one that I am still trying to understand. For the longest time, I harboured doubt as to my… proper place.”

“And now?” Hannibal’s tone is cool but his expression vulnerable and unmasked.

“And now,” Will murmurs as he meets Hannibal’s eyes, “now I know my place *is* with my family; those who stand under the same stars, even when we are sepatated.” Hannibal’s stuttering blink is the only sign he gives that he has understood Will’s words. The space between them is silent for long minutes while Hannibal gathers up the photos from his desk, taking time to reorient them and stack them neatly before placing them back into the meal tray.

“I pity this Great Red Dragon, should he threaten your place with your family now that you have found it,” Hannibal says as he steps back from the hatch.

Will smiles grimly. “So do I.”

***

The voice on the line is rich and deep, strong, but with a subtle softening of consonants that speaks to Hannibal of long-healed damage, most likely a corrected harelip or cleft palate.

“The Red Dragon was all I had for a long time,” the voice says, vibrating over the cloned connection. “Our bodies, voices, wills were one. But not now. Not since her.” The voice

deepens further, becomes gentle and reverent. *Ah, we have more in common that you realise, my mysterious friend.*

“This new twoness with the Dragon,” Hannibal chooses his words carefully so as not to draw attention to the young man’s internal conflict. Self-awareness now might confuse his plans and bring ruin to Hannibal’s design. “It's *disorienting* for you.” He makes it sound simple; a slight adjustment in direction is all that is needed to once again find the way.

“The Dragon never spoke to me before,” the voice is husky, hesitant. “It was frightening.”

“What did it say?” Hannibal does not need to simulate curiosity. He is genuinely enthralled by the potential contained in the ruinous duality of this soul. He wants to whisper into its dark casing and watch for what rich destruction will follow its emergence.

“It called my name. It wants her.” The caller’s resentment is clear. Here is the one thing that the man will not share with his monster.

“If it weren't for the power of your Becoming, if it weren't for the Dragon, you could've never had her.” This is what the man believes; that he is made strong and whole by the monster waking inside him. There is something small and hidden inside Hannibal, a bright thread woven in his darkness, that wishes to warn this boy that his monster may be more of a hindrance than a help in matters of the heart. He fears that if he does so, any chance to fulfil his own heart may be lost.

“I don't want to give her to the Dragon.” The voice sounds childish and naïve in its resolve. Pity and disgust war within Hannibal for this creature that would set itself above him. Swallowing it all down, he adopts a tone of gentle encouragement.

“You have the Dragon in your belly now. You could choose to have her alive. You don't have to worry about feeling love for her.” Then, off-handedly he adds, “you can always toss the Dragon someone else.”

The voice makes no response. Hannibal strains to hear the sound of quick, deep, breaths made a careful distance from the receiver. When the voice speaks, the breaths and words once again slow and measured.

“Will Graham interests me,” it says in a curious tone, “odd-looking for an investigator. Not very handsome, but purposeful.”

“Will Graham is no one,” Hannibal says with studied casualness. “A mad man. The very fact of his presence is a sign of the FBI’s desperation.”

“ *It takes one to catch one* ,” the voice intones. “He caught you.”

“So what will you do,” Hannibal whispers, “if you also wish to catch me?”

***

Three nights from now. We’ll hunt under a harvest moon.

Will pops the SIM from the slot, snaps it between his fingers and drops it over the side of the bridge. He separates the battery from the cell, snaps the main board in two and hurls the whole lot into the centre of the river. He peels the gloves from his hands and stuffs them into his pocket; he'll toss them when he stops for coffee.

Summer is waning and the wind off the river cuts like a knife through Will's light jacket. He climbs eagerly into the Land Rover and guns the engine to coax the heater back to life, then fiddles with the radio while he waits for his frozen feet and hands to thaw. He finds a college station and hums along as he eases the SUV onto the unsealed road and back toward the highway. Despite the tension of the day, Will's heart feels strangely light and once he hits the blacktop, he floors the pedal straight to one hundred and sings with the radio as the road rolls away into the dark.

Two hours and one truly awful gas station coffee later, Will pulls into the hotel parking lot. He slips from the Land Rover to stand under a sky clear and richly studded with stars. He turns his back to the streetlights along the highway and tilts his face upward, waiting patiently for Perseus and Andromeda to emerge from the sparkling clutter. They float above him, lovers perpetually separated and reaching across the sky.

Love and tragedy, passion and bloodshed. In myth there is never one without the other. *You play, you pay* . Will is not so ignorant to think that he could quit now without settling his debt, but he wonders whether that quiet death by a sniper's bullet might be preferable to the hell that will be unleashed if his plan is successful. He doubts there is anything he could do now that would halt the destruction that will follow in the wake of his and Hannibal's love, even if he wanted to try.

***

Will sleeps deeply. For the first time since since Jack arrived on his doorstep he is undisturbed by grandiose visions of moonlight and blood. Instead, he dreams of his kitchen in Wolf Trap, the windows golden with dying daylight.

Will is making tea. He can't smell it yet but he knows it's chamomile and mint from the wild patch of herbs at the end of his garden. He knows because he has lived this afternoon in his memory a thousand times.

There is a battered, muddy, truck parked crookedly under the trees where Will's side yard melts into the woods. Hannibal had laid both their stolen coats over a pile of dry leaves on the edge of a strip-mall parking lot and placed Will carefully upon them with whispered reassurances of his return, before creeping through the pre-dawn dark and hot-wiring an aged Chevy to bring them home. When they arrived, they had washed and dressed their wounds as best they could before falling side-by-side into the bed in the front room and sleeping like dead men through the morning and into the late afternoon.

There is a quiet susurrus of bare feet against the floorboards and Hannibal is behind him, hands at his waist.

"You should be resting," he says in a low voice.

“I rested all the way here,” Will replies, shaking the teapot gently to agitate the leaves. “It’s you ought to be taking it easy after carrying me a country mile through the snow.”

“We have been parted too long,” Hannibal says easily. He slides his hands around Will’s stomach and rests them together over the scar hidden under Will’s t-shirt. “I do not wish to waste the time we have.”

“Just like that,” Will says disbelievingly as he stirs honey into the tea. “Just like that, you would forgive and forget?”

“I could never forget you,” Hannibal murmurs into Will’s neck. He presses closer, connecting their bodies seamlessly from neck to knee and hooking his chin over Will’s shoulder. “We cannot return to what we were, no more than a teacup can truly once again become whole, but together we could remake our pieces into something beautiful.”

Will turns in Hannibal’s arms. He brushes Hannibal’s fringe, silver in the fading light, away from his face and traces a line across his forehead with one finger. “Two days ago,” he says, trying to keep the bitterness from his voice, “you tried to eat my brain.”

Hannibal opens his mouth to speak and Will places the finger against his lips. “Uh-uh, Hannibal, no interrupting. It’s very rude.” Hannibal’s gaze hardens slightly, but he says nothing more.

“And the last time I saw you,” Will goes on without removing his finger, “you broke up with me using a linoleum cutter.” With his free hand Will presses both of Hannibal’s hands to the scar across his stomach, trying to ignore the tugging of a phantom blade. “As far as break-ups go, that’s pretty fucking final.”

“I forgave you your trespasses,” Hannibal says softly then slips his hands under Will’s t-shirt to stroke the still new and red-raw scar with gentle fingertips. He traces the jagged edges reverently, his eyes as wide and ecstatic as a stained-glass pilgrim’s. With a choked sound he drops to his knees and buries his face in Will’s shirt. His face is hot and damp, silent tears soaking into the soft cotton.

“Hannibal-”

Whatever Will was planning to say is lost in a low moan when Hannibal replaces his fingertips with his lips and tongue. “Oh,” he says instead, “Oh, God.”

Nobody has touched Will like this since, well, since Hannibal, and he is suddenly *starved* for it. He winds his fingers into Hannibal’s hair, gently scraping his nails against his scalp. He holds Hannibal in place with light pressure on the back of his neck, delighting in the familiar feel of downy hair against his fingers. With the other hand, he guides Hannibal’s fingers to the waistband of his boxers.

Will feels more than hears Hannibal’s sharp intake of breath. “Will?”

“I missed you,” Will pants. His heart is racing so fast he can barely breathe. “I missed you so fucking much, all the time. It was like you cut out everything you ever gave me and took

it with you."

"Shh," Hannibal croons, "I kept it safe for you, my darling. It was always yours. *I* was always yours." He winds his arms around Will's waist and rests his forehead in the hollow beneath Will's sternum.

Will's says brokenly, "I was so afraid, I *am* so afraid. I don't know if I can be like you."

Hannibal gets smoothly to his feet. He raises his hands to cup Will's face between his palms. "Oh, Will," he says, so gently. Slowly, giving Will time to pull away, he leans in. Will surges suddenly forward and meets Hannibal's lips, kisses him like he is drowning, like he might never kiss him again. Hannibal tastes like sleep and Will's toothpaste and under that, the faint sour metal taste of old blood. Will licks into his mouth, feeling the sweet slide of lips and tongue and the scrape of sharp, crooked teeth.

A moment later those teeth are at his jaw, then his neck, then in the hollow of his collarbone. Hannibal is tugging at the hem of Will's shirt. He pulls it off roughly, dropping his head further to bite and lick at Will's chest, the edges of his biceps, and his nipples. Will's breath comes out in a hiss that might have been *yes* and Hannibal pushes him back against the counter with one leg shoved hard between his thighs. Will is already hard and the tip of his cock is wet where it rubs against his boxers. He ruts against Hannibal, already slightly dizzy with desire.

"May I take you to bed?" Hannibal asks softly, still nuzzling at Will's chest.

"You may," Will says with a laughing sigh. "You definitely, definitely may."

Hannibal takes the permission literally, bracing his knees and scooping Will up bridal-style. Will giggles while Hannibal carries him through into the front room and places him down neatly against the pillows before climbing over him. Hannibal stays crouched over Will on all fours until Will stops laughing and lifts his face for a kiss, then he fits himself between Will's legs and slips down to cover him.

They lie like that for long minutes, held close, kissing, moving slowly. Will lets his mind drift, feeling the smouldering edges of Hannibal's desire bleed into him, stoking his own arousal until it blooms bright and hot again. He hitches one leg over Hannibal's hip and the changed angle lets his cock slip alongside Hannibal's. He rolls his hips gently and Hannibal's breath catches, then he breathes out Will's name on a groan.

"Yes, I'm here," Will whispers breathlessly, "it's me, it's *us* . Oh, God, Hannibal-" he breaks off with a curse. "Fuck, just take your fucking pants off already, would you?"

In a somewhat uncharacteristic show of obedience, Hannibal does just that, shoving his pants down over his thighs, shimmying them off and kicking them off the side of the bed. Lithe as a big cat, he pounces on Will and drags his shorts down too before dropping them alongside his pants on the floor. They are bare, hot skin against hot skin, Hannibal's hips pressing into Will's, legs tangled, breathing each other's speeding breath.

Hannibal leans his weight on his forearms and runs his fingers through Will's hair, stroking his forehead and the tips of his ears, his eyebrows, his cheekbones and finally, his lips. Will twines his tongue around Hannibal's fingertips then draws two fingers deep into his mouth, laving them with the flat of his tongue. He lets them slip out for a moment then draws them back in, meeting Hannibal's eyes from beneath lowered lashes as he sucks with hollowed cheeks.

"Ah," Hannibal's cry is hoarse and inarticulate. He thrusts clumsily and his cock slips against Will's, smearing precome between their bodies.

"Yes, darling," he murmurs, finding his voice again at the same time as he pushes his fingers further along Will's tongue. "As wet as you can."

Will obliges, watching Hannibal with wide dark eyes as he slurps and licks. When Hannibal finally withdraws from him, Will's lips and chin are wet and there is a shining thread of saliva trickling down Hannibal's wrist. Will, although it is ridiculous to be embarrassed *now* , he thinks, blushes and drops his eyes. Hannibal catches his jaw with the back of his hand and tilts his face up again.

"Beautiful," he rasps. "What a good boy you are."

Will's blush deepens but he keeps his eyes on Hannibal's and releases the low whimper he had been holding behind his teeth. Hannibal smiles as he works his wet hand down between them, then whispers, "look at us, darling," as he wraps it tightly around their cocks and starts to stroke.

" *Fuck* , Hannibal-" Will closes his eyes. He's afraid that if he looks at them again, at their swollen reddened shafts together in Hannibal's hand, that he might come and it will all be over too soon. No matter how long it lasts, Will knows it will always end too soon, that he could never, ever have enough of this.

Hannibal's voice comes slow and thick, his accent slurring and softening his words, " *Will , je t'adore* -" he breaks off into mumbled words, wholly indecipherable. His fingers dig tightly into Will's shoulder and Will can feel the blood well beneath his neat nails. A jumble of throaty foreign exclamations are followed by a deep groan and the steady rhythm of Hannibal's hips falters. His release comes in hot pulses over Will's hips, his stomach, and the oversensitised head of his cock. Will opens his eyes to watch Hannibal's face; his lashes fluttering, mouth open and reddened, tongue shaping endearments and curses.

The site of Hannibal so undone, the smell of sex and semen and clean skin are too much for Will. He closes his eyes and lets go, coming into Hannibal's hand with a hiccupping cry that is almost a sob. He presses damp open-mouth kisses along Hannibal's neck, his jaw, the corner of his mouth and then over his lips, tasting and smelling and trying to commit to memory the exact feel of Hannibal's stubble and the way he smells of sweat and soap and Will's sheets.

His dreaming self blinks and the afternoon is gone, the house surrounded by cold darkling dusk. Hannibal is seated by the bed, scribbling in a notebook and sipping fresh tea. He has showered and redressed in Will's clothes; neat suit pants and an old, soft sweater.

“Do we talk about teacups and time and the rules of disorder?” He asks. His eyes in the half light have the keen, golden glow of a predator.

“The teacup is broken,” Will replies with a heavy heart. He turns his face away and watches night gathering at the corners of the room. “It'll never gather itself back together again.”

“Not even in your mind?” Will looks back at him, then down to the notebook page filled with arcane equations and sketches.

“Your memory palace is building. It's full of new things.” Hannibal says hopefully. His lips quirk in an almost-smile. “It shares some rooms with my own. I've discovered you there. Victorious.”

Funny, it doesn’t feel a thing like victory . Will thinks sadly. What he says is, “When it comes to you and me, there can be no decisive victory.”

“We are a zero-sum game?”

Will looks around at his home, unchanged despite his long months of absence. He looks down at his own body, thinner and more scarred and then he looks at Hannibal. He sits on the edge of his chair, legs tensed and hands tightly clasped. His lips are parted, but he’s waiting for Will to speak. A monster with his heart in his eyes.

Will turns his face away, focussing instead on his worktable. There is a lure there, half-wound, deep red feathers and shining copper beads.

“I’m tired of looking for you. I’m tired of wondering where you are, what you are doing. I’m tired of reliving the night you left.” *The night you killed our daughter* .

“I’m going to miss you,” he says, and it’s the truth, “but I don't want to think about you anymore.” He thinks it’s possible that is also true.

Hannibal stands and the light from the hallway casts his shadow over the bed. “You delight in wickedness and then berate yourself for the delight,” he spits. An injured beast, lashing out in anticipation of more pain.

“You delight,” Will replies hotly. “I.. tolerate.” He remembers the surge of pride he felt hoisting up his completed tableau of Mischa’s killer; the way the broken glass had sparkled and glowed in the lamplight.

“Tolerance is a fig leaf to hide your ravenous self from the world.” Eve ate from the tree of knowledge and learned to hide her body from Adam. Will ate human flesh and learned to hide his monster.

“I don't have your appetite.” Will says dully, staring off into the night. The lie tastes like burned and bitter flesh. *Fear spoils the meat* , he remembers.

“Good-bye, Hannibal,” he murmurs. The window beside him reflects only the empty room, and he can hear the distant sound of sirens. He closes his eyes.

When he wakes, he is in his hotel room in Baltimore.

He isn’t alone.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

In a town in the east
The parishioners were visited upon by a curious beast
And his eyes numbered but one and shone like the sun
And a glance beckoned the immediate loss of a cherished one

Black Shuck - The Darkness

Will meets The Dragon. Alana visits Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

Your humble author's life has taken some twists and turns since last we met. My well-meaning psychiatrist prescribed something that sent me into a chemical-fuelled suicidal spiral, requiring a complete and immediate discontinuation of all my meds while also trying to support a neuro-atypical husband and parent two preschoolers. It's been a pretty fucking average innings.

If you are still following me and interested in the conclusion of my tale, I thank you. I'm fairly sure that writing keeps me together (don't tell my therapist - she's convinced that it's all her). If you'd given up on ever knowing the fate of our brave protagonist, I don't blame you. If you're a new reader, welcome to the mess that is my first multi-chapter story.

Some dialogue and story elements from Hannibal episode 3X13, bent slightly to fit my canon-divergent requirements.

Title from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* by Anne Bradstreet.

Will senses the movement just an instant too late.

Heavy footsteps, only just muffled by the worn woolen carpet, rush toward him like the tumble of water over stones. Strong arms wrap around his biceps and lift him bodily from the bed and just a moment later he is overwhelmed by the sugar-sweet burn of Chloroform,

burning like strong liquor in his nose and throat. The world swims, shadows and filtered yellow light from the car park brighten and twist, becoming monstrous shapes that fill Will's vision before his consciousness is finally snuffed out and all is quiet and cool and black.

***

Will dreams of the stream at Wolf Trap. He wades victorious from the current, a string of shining silver trout over one shoulder and his rod over the other. Cool water drips from his waders onto Hannibal's bare feet when Will comes to stand over him where he dozes in the shade of a gnarled apple tree, sketchbook open on his chest and an insulated wine cup by his outstretched arm.

Hannibal stirs, startled from slumber by Will's shadow and the icy trickle of water between his toes. His eyes glint; the warning of a predator disturbed at rest. The dangerous hardness of his gaze softens into curious affection when he recognises Will silhouetted against the sinking sun.

"What souls have you lured onto your hook, dear Will?" Hannibal asks as he pushes up onto his elbows, his voice rough and thick from sleep.

"Rainbow Trout," Will says with amusement, "although I believe the jury is still out as to whether fish have souls."

"I'd be happy to discuss theological philosophies on animals," Hannibal says, stretching his back in a fluid arc. Will lets his gaze linger on the unlikely curve of Hannibal's spine, the cords of his upper arms, and the flex of his long feet. "But I may need to refresh myself a little before we begin our debate," Hannibal adds, rolling to a crouch and gaining his feet without waiting for Will's reply.

Will packs his catch into the cooler and strips off his waders and boots while Hannibal wanders into the brush above the bank, presumably to relieve himself. Hannibal returns quickly and heads straight to the water's edge, dropping to a crouch to rinse his hands in the swiftly-moving current. The dying sunlight catches in his hair and turns blonde and ash to gold, gilding him with the halo of a renaissance saint. His profile is lit with glowing warmth and for a breathtaking moment Will lets himself forget that this beautiful wild thing in the water is a monster, that the teeth behind his lush lips were made sharp enough to feed an appalling appetite.

Hannibal turns then, seemingly unsurprised by Will's frank and openly hungry stare. He holds out a freshly-washed hand and says, "shall we walk together?"

They walk slowly in the sandy shallows. They don't discuss theology, but rather the wild herbs along the banks and the best time to pick mushrooms. Hannibal wanders from the stream to pull up a handful of dandelion greens which he transfers carefully to his left hand upon his return to the water, leaving his right free to brush against Will's as they move.

Reluctantly, at long last, Will slows and says, "If you are still planning to cook dinner, we'd better turn around," he casts a rueful glance at the sun, sinking low now over the treeline and adds, "it'll be dark soon."

“Tell me Will,” Hannibal says, pausing in his stride, “what is it that you believe we should fear, should darkness fall on us?”

Will thinks for a moment and then grins, saying, “I don’t believe there is anything more dangerous in these woods than my current company, Doctor Lecter. And I-”

Will stops short, biting down on his words, uncomfortable with the truth that they might reveal.

“Yes, Will?” Hannibal prompts in a mild tone as he turns to face Will, the cool curiosity in his face and posture belied by the fire in his golden eyes.

“I’m not..,” Will whispers, forcing himself to meet Hannibal’s questing gaze. There’s no amusement there, but anticipation, excitement, and…pride. Emboldened, Will raises his chin and says firmly, “I’m not afraid of you.”

Smiling, Hannibal takes Will’s chin between his fingers.

“No,” he says thoughtfully, his bright eyes never leaving Will’s, “you aren’t, are you?” He leans closer to Will, slowly, clearly telegraphing his intention with sparking bright eyes and parted lips. Will licks his own lips reflexively, and swallows. His mouth is dry, but still sweet from the apples they had eaten with their lunch. He wonders if Hannibal will taste like apples, too.

The kiss is brief, chaste, and unexpectedly tender. *Polite* , Will thinks with amusement, *so like Hannibal* . Will pushes back hungrily, rough and open and thoroughly indecorous. Hannibal makes a broken noise in his throat like a choked moan and Will feels his heart speed in response. He wraps his arms around Hannibal’s waist and presses close; close enough to feel the heat of Hannibal’s body through his shirt and waistcoat and the firm line of his thigh against Will’s own. Will tugs Hannibal’s bottom lip between his teeth and Hannibal responds with a slick twist of his tongue, a brief devilish scrape of teeth that leaves Will panting for breath when they draw apart. Will, opening eyes that he didn’t remember closing, looks into Hannibal’s face and sees-

the inky black eyes of the Wendigo . His antlers loom in silhouette against the last rays of the sun, striping Will with cold shadows. The stream and the woods and the sky are gone and in their place are the cold bars and bare brick of his cell. The Wendigo watches him with sad dark eyes from the other side of the bars, its gnarled black toes neatly behind the yellow visitor line. From behind him, Will hears the sound of water; a drip, a trickle, and then an echoing roar like a river. When he turns, it is to face the cold, soaking rush of an ocean wave that engulfs him and drags him under.

***

Will wakes to a cool splash of water on his face. He struggles upright in spluttering panic, remembering the feeling of icy salt water feeling his throat and lungs. The water on his lips is fresh and cool, and tastes faintly of copper; *tap water* , he realises with relief.

He opens his eyes just in time to snatch at the towel thrown against his face. It's rough and dry, but smells only faintly of detergent. Will wipes it over his chin and cheeks with shaking hands, then scrubs it through his damp hair and hangs it around his neck to keep water from dripping down his back. He shivers in the cold air.

"Are you alright?" Asks a low voice from beside Will. The bedside lamp clicks on and the formless shadow at his bedside resolves into a tall man with strong, handsome, features and broad shoulders. An old scar marrs the fine line of his lips and lends a slight thickness to his speech. *Dolarhyde* .

Will groans inarticulately and swallows down a swell of nausea. If there's one thing that he has learned from a career in law enforcement, it's that very few situations are improved by vomiting. He breathes slowly, focusing on the gleaming lines of the silenced pistol held loosely in Dolarhyde's hand.

"Deep breaths," Dolarhyde says quietly, "it'll clear your head faster."

After a moment he puts his free hand to Will's elbow, asking, "Do you think you can sit up?".

Will pushes himself up slowly to sit against the pillows. The nausea rises with his movement and then settles again when he stills. "You didn't kill me," he laughs.

"Not today," Dolarhyde replies solemnly. He studies Will from under his thick dark brows, head cocked just slightly to one side. Will matches his steady gaze.

Eventually, Dolarhyde frowns and says, "Your face is closed to me."

"If I can see you," replies Will blandly, "you can see me."

The corner of Dolarhyde's mouth lifts in amusement. He blinks once, snake-like, and murmurs, "You think you understand, don't you?"

"I understand that blood and breath are only elements undergoing change to fuel your radiance." Will quotes, lifting his chin defiantly. There is a flash of anger in Dolarhyde's reptilian eyes.

"Hannibal said those words," Will says confidingly. "To me."

"I tried to share with Lecter, and Lecter betrayed me." Dolarhyde snarls. His natural teeth are neat and evenly sized. *Like a trout,* Will thinks, remembering his dream. He wonders whether the flavour of The Dragon has made its way into Francis Dolarhyde's flesh.

"He betrayed me, too." Will's tone is warm and inviting. He smiles to show his own small, even teeth.

Dolarhyde pulls a chair up to the side of the bed and sits with his calloused hands braced on his knees. "I would like to share," he says firmly.

"You shared with Reba," Will reminds him.

“I shared with Reba a little, in a way she could survive,” Dolarhyde allows, seemingly unwilling to rise to Will’s needling. “She had one flash of my glory.”

Will feels the shadow of Dolarhyde’s confusion rise, its twisted wings stretching out to cover a burning, faceless, body. He smells blood and dust and fear. “You didn’t change her,” he says smugly.

“I *chose* not to change her.” Dolarhyde stands and begins to pace. His words spill out in a toneless stream as he moves and his agitation is like smoke trails across Will’s mind. “I thought, ‘Dare I? Of course I do’ I'm stronger than The Dragon now.” He stops and turns back to Will, inviting a challenge.

“Of course you are,” says Will placatingly, “strong enough that I’m nothing more than an annoyance to you. Hannibal Lecter is who you need to change.”

“I want to meet Lecter. I want to tell him important things.” Dolarhyde springs up on the bed beside Will, lifting a hand to Will’s bare throat and stroking thoughtfully as he asks, “How could I manage that?”

***

Jack and Will stand side-by-side next to Francis Dolarhyde’s corpse. The dry, recycled air in the lab smells of formaldehyde, charred flesh and powdered latex. Will peels off his glove and wishes fervently for a cup of coffee. His encounter with The Great Red Dragon had left him wary and wakeful and he had dozed only fitfully until dawn when he had finally given up and rolled out of bed.

“The Great Red Dragon lives.” Will pronounces with the grandeur of an augur. Jack turns on his heel, sullen and silent, and abruptly exits the lab. Will offers a wry salute to Price and Zeller then follows Jack from the room. Unfortunately, they are headed *away* from the coffee machine.

When they reach Jack’s office, Jack takes pity on Will and makes him a cup from the Nespresso machine behind his desk.

“You look like hell, Graham,” Jack says as he hands Will the coffee, “you not sleeping?”

“Not since you knocked on my door, no,” replies Will tartly, clutching at the cup between his hands. Jack gives him a look that clearly says *knock that shit off and drink your coffee* . Will obeys, drinking in silence for long minutes during which he and Jack look anywhere but at each other.

“The obvious thing,” he says when the cup is empty, “is to try to get him to come to us. Bait him with something he wants more than me.”

“He’d be an idiot to go for it.” Jack shakes his head, still staring out of the window. It’s not a ‘no’, just disappointment that they have run out of time to form a better plan.

“I know. I also know that his fucking *Dragon* won’t let him swim away from the bait. Want to hear what the best bait would be?” Will's voice lilts and he presses his tongue to his teeth like a child with a secret.

“I'm not sure I do,” says Jack cautiously, unnerved by Will’s sudden excitement.

Will swallows down his nerves and looks straight at Jack. The light tone of his voice never wavers as he says, “ *Hannibal* would be the best bait.”

“Why in God's name would anybody want to meet Hannibal Lecter?” Jack’s confused roar rolls over Will like a wave. He was expecting it, and it’s a simple thing to keep his body loose and his smile easy when he replies.

“To kill him, Jack.”

After that, it’s easy.

***

“I’ll leave it with you, then.” Jack says brusquely and disconnects the call.

Alana places the phone carefully into the cradle and sinks back into her chair. She thinks about calling back and telling Jack about Will & Hannibal’s affair and wonders whether it would even make a difference. It might have once, but the Jack who returned from Italy is a driven, dangerous man who will sacrifice every one of his own pieces to capture a single opponent - or to kill them.

She struggles to see what advantage Will hopes to gain by re-entering the game between Jack and Hannibal; he is risking everything that he has won back by leaving, and the lives of anyone in the path between Hanninbal and The Dragon.

Hannibal’s freedom, however brief, holds the potential for devastating collateral damage. And Alana suspects that neither he or Will intend for it to be brief.

Who holds the Devil, let him hold him well, Alana thinks grimly, *he will hardly be caught a second time.* She accepted the role of Hannibal’s keeper for only one reason; to hold the keys to the doors between him and her family. If Hannibal is no longer a prisoner here, then nor is Alana.

That is a prize worth playing for.

She picks up the receiver and dials the monitoring station for Hannibal’s cell from memory.

“This is Director Bloom,” Alana snaps as soon as the guard answers. “I want a thirty minute pause on Lecter’s audio. I’ll be by in a few minutes to sign the log.”

Alana stands and strides towards the door. On a second thought, she detours to the bookcase to pick up a bottle of wine and two glasses. It is likely that they will both find their conversation somewhat…distasteful.

The guard has the logbook open and waiting when she arrives at the station.

“Start now, m’am?” He asks Alana smartly, hands poised over his keyboard.

“Yes, thank you. Thirty minutes or until I exit the cell.” As she walks away, Alana hears the guard reciting their names for the recording. He falls silent as she approaches the wide shining door to the antechamber. Alana waves off the guard standing by the door and unlocks it with her own keys from a ring fastened tight to her belt.

She blinks as she enters, letting her eyes adjust to the low light. Hannibal is sitting cross-legged on his bare mattress, eyes closed and palms open on his thighs.

“Good evening, Alana.” He greets her without opening his eyes.

Alana goes straight to the meals hatch. She pours two generous glasses of wine and places the bottle on the floor under the hatch. Taking up one glass, she unlocks the hatch with her other hand and pushes the glass through, locking it again before nodding to Hannibal, whose eyes are now open and watching.

“What is it that has you twisted up in knots?” He asks as he approaches the tray, feline grace seemingly unhampered by his poor mattress. “Your lovely wife has come home, has she not?”

Alana raises an eyebrow in an invitation for Hannibal to elaborate. He does so love to put on a show.

“Your footfalls are more forceful than usual and closer together and you are still on site although it is past your usual time of departure.” He explains with a fluid shrug, then adds, “there have been no alarms, so the source of your distress is something either personal or confidential. I doubt it is marital disharmony; you smell of Margot’s perfume, and just a lingering hint of silicone-based lubricant.”

Hannibal glances down into his glass, watching the light play in his wine and testing the bouquet with an exaggerated sniff.

“It’s *unscented* .” Alana huffs crossly, taking a long swallow of her wine to cover her embarrassment. “And I didn’t come here to talk about Margot. There’s a deal for you, Hannibal.”

He raises an eyebrow and takes a considering sip of his wine. “A deal? With whom?”

“The FBI,” Alana says tensely, tapping her neatly manicured fingernails against her glass. It won’t get any easier with waiting, she knows. She blows out a breath and, struggling to keep her tone even, she tells Hannibal “The Red Dragon faked his own death.”

Hannibal blinks once and his brows draw together ever so slightly; more of a *tilt* than a frown. The expression is gone again before Alana can completely parse it, but she has the strangest feeling he isn’t surprised. He was expecting *something* , but is only now discovering the shape of it.

“Did he?” Hannibal asks. The delight in his voice is genuine when he adds, “Good for him.”

With a glance at her watch, Alana decides to cut straight to chase.

“Jack wants to fake your escape.” Hannibal’s head straightens and his eyes focus directly on Alana’s face, seeking avidly for signs of deception. She sits calmly and lets him look his fill before continuing. “I release you into police custody and Jack uses you as bait.”

Alana admires Hannibal’s affection of cool interest as he asks, “Was it Will’s idea?”

“Yes,” Alana confirms. She sits back in her chair and crosses one leg over the other before taking a sip of wine and continuing in the same pleasant voice, “and that’s the problem I have, Hannibal.”

“Oh?” Hannibal prompts.

“I could stop this.” Alana says with her eyes on her wine. It’s easier if she doesn’t look at him. “Call Jack and tell him what I know.”

Hannibal takes another sip of his wine before asking, “And what is it that you think you know?”

“That Will Graham is prepared to dirty much more than the knees of his jeans for you.” Hannibal lets out that familiar sharp breath that is as good a belly laugh for anyone else.

“My dry cleaner could assure you that the sentiment is returned entirely.” He replies wryly and Alana does her best not to smile. She hides her face in her wine glass and deliberately doesn’t think about Hannibal scuffing the knees of one of his bespoke suits.

Hannibal waits politely for Alana to compose herself before asking, “You do not believe Will is earnest in his desire to put an end to the crimes of this Red Dragon?”

“I believe Will intends to put an end to Francis Dolarhyde’s crimes. I just don’t believe he intends for either of you to return afterwards.” Alana lets silence fall while she drains the rest of her wine and pours another glass. She raises the bottle to Hannibal, who declines with a small shake of his head.

“The thing is, Hannibal,” Alana begins, looking down at her hands. She fingers her wedding ring nervously as she goes on, “as long as you are here, I can’t trust anyone else to hold the keys; to keep my family safe. If you were free, I’d be free too.”

“You would be free to die.” Hannibal says, but there is no fire in his words. “I promised you death, dear Alana.”

Alana’s hands are hot against the stem of her glass. Sweat breaks out between her shoulder blades and she draws a shaky breath when she raises her eyes to meet those of the monster who holds her heart in its hands.

“Make me a new promise,” she says.

The monster smiles.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Some pray to God the night before a battle. Will and Hannibal worship at their own altar.

Or, a prison break, a reunion, and some pillow-talk.

Chapter Notes

I wrestled with this chapter on and off for two months and have finally decided that I do want to give this story an ending, so I'm just going to post it. We're not quite at the end yet, and I know I've said this before, but I think one more ought to do it.

If there's anyone still out there, thank you for hanging on with me to see this through.

Some dialogue and story elements from Hannibal episode 3X13, bent slightly to fit my canon-divergent requirements.

Title from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* by Anne Bradstreet.

“Hannibal has tentatively agreed to the deal, as proposed.” Alana takes the offered glass from Jack and wraps her fingers around it, letting it cool her palms. In some ways she isn’t entirely different from the Alana who was pushed from Hannibal’s window; even this much dishonesty fits uncomfortably about her throat and wrists. It dries her mouth and heats her skin. She swallows.

Jack passes a glass to Will, who holds it loosely between two fingers. He slouches against Jack’s desk, his back to Alana. “What will make him less tentative?” Jack asks, lifting his own drink.

Alana wants to bite her lip. Instead, she tightens her fingers on her tumbler and replies, “he wants Will to ask him”.

Will turns to her with a sharp look. Clearly, he wasn’t expecting this. Alana cradles her unexpected power close to her chest, feeling its potential. After a moment she relents with a magnanimous, tight-lipped smile and says, “he wants you to say ‘please’".

Will smiles back, a gleam of teeth in the dim light from Jack's desk lamp. It doesn't reach his eyes. "I'll say ' *pretty please* '".

They make a silent toast; a gruesome parody of their past camaraderie. Will smiles again at Alana as he sips his whiskey and she sees, for the first time, the thing behind his eyes that calls to Hannibal's monster. Something primitive and reptilian at the very base of Alana's brain fires off a warning and her thighs tense, instinctively readying for flight. The Alana who kissed Will amidst plaster-dust and broken bricks never wanted to see, but this Alana, broken and reset and *changed* , knows that Will is dangerous. A chill chases the hot flush from her hands and cheeks.

What have I done?

***

Hannibal and Will sit side-by-side on a reed mat under the blossoming cherry tree in Hannibal's garden, their legs outstretched and their feet bare. Will can feel the heat of Hannibal all along his side, close but not touching. He breathes in the smell of herbs mixed with Hannibal's cologne and his mouth waters. The lawn is green and neat and bright flowers bloom in the garden beds. The pond is clear and clean and ripples with the constant movement of sleek golden fish beneath its surface.

"I was waiting for you," Hannibal rumbles. His hair is too short to appear obviously mussed, but his eyes are soft with sleep and his voice is thick in a way that Will remembers well. "I feared we might have said our goodbyes."

"We've one last goodbye to make." Will says, letting the garden fade away to take in the truth of Hannibal, who is blinking away sleep as he stands from his cot and stretches. His feet are bare, and the broad expanse of his chest is revealed by the placket of his open jumpsuit. His lost weight is evident in the slight press of his lower ribs against his skin when he reaches for a tee-shirt and Will aches a little at the sight.

Hannibal follows his gaze. "I have no complaints as to Alana's treatment, but even the meals I prepare myself are a pale imitation of the diet to which I am accustomed."

Will snorts. "Yeah, I suppose she has to draw the line at long pig."

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. "It might surprise you," he says primly, "that I was more concerned with being unable to access organic vegetables. I am concerned that I have been exposed to commercial pesticides."

"Better Chlorpyrifos than Pavulon and potassium chloride, don't you think?" Will asks archly, stepping aside to accommodate the phalanx of orderlies and armed guards who have entered the room behind him to approach the locked portal to Hannibal's cell. A young man, one of Hannibal's regular guards, holds up a forensic bite mask as he nears Hannibal, who is now standing quietly against the wall with a guard on either side.

"Good morning," Hannibal greets him politely, without responding to Will's deliberate provocation. "Are we going somewhere?"

“You’re being transferred,” the young man answers, still holding up the mask. “Please, Doctor Lecter, lift your head away from the wall and tilt your chin down. I am going to place this mask over the lower half of your face. Please signal with a raised open palm if you experience any obstruction of your breathing.”

“Of course.” Hannibal replies, lowering his gaze to the floor.

“You’ve been summonsed to New Jersey to answer further charges.” Will says blandly, mostly for the benefit of the guards. “I’ve been asked to accompany you during your transit.”

“Is Uncle Jack offering us quality time to resolve our differences?” Hannibal asks flatly. “How *thoughtful* .” The orderly fastens the mask.

“I’m sure we can keep it professional,” Will says in an echo of his long-ago dismissal. Hannibal meets his eyes over the mask and there is a spark in his eyes; a smouldering *something* all too ready to burst into familiar flame. Will lowers his chin and looks up at Hannibal from under his lashes.

“Please, Hannibal.” He murmurs.

***

The van ride is a blur of shrieking road noise, stale air, and the feel of Hannibal’s eyes. Will fixes his gaze on the far corner of the van and forces himself to breathe. *In for four, hold for seven, out for eight,* exactly like the hospital counsellor had taught him.

Will’s eyes are averted but his mind and the full force of his gift are focussed on Hannibal.

...I have denied my hunger but the sight of you, the smell of you, after so long is more than I can bear. I drink my fill of your face and your scent in case in case I am mistaken and I am in fact destined only for another prison cell.

I am excited for the possibilities of you, my cunning boy, but I must remain patient until your design is revealed...

Will is giddy with Hannibal’s excitement, which he sees plainly in the arch of his light brows and in the fluid bend of one slim ankle. Will lets Hannibal see the tension in his muscles when he pushes his feet firmly into the floor and braces his hands against the narrow bench, gripping the lip where it curls under. Hannibal’s posture shifts in his peripheral vision, ankles straightening and feet bracing against the edges of his cage.

The gunshots that come minutes later with a crack like a starter pistol, seeming deafeningly close. Two tires collapse, then the van slides from the road and tumbles, shaking the guards loose from their perches opposite Will and slamming them into the tailgate. One man comes to rest by Will’s knees, stomach flat to the floor and blank eyes looking up at Will in suspended surprise.

The other man lies crumpled in the corner, chest heaving and blood spilling from his mouth. He moans. Will turns away.

Will takes the keys from the dead guard's belt and unlocks the cage. His shoulder aches and his head is ringing but he fumbles the buckles on Hannibal's restraint open with numb fingers. When his arms are free, Hannibal reaches for the secure straps of the bite mask.

"Let me," Will says gently, and reaches up to pull it free. He smoothes Hannibal's damp hair back into place, smiling at the feel of it under his palm. "It's, uh, short. Sort of tickles," he says in answer to Hannibal's raised brows.

Hannibal lays a hand to his face, eyes locked to Will's. Will turns abruptly away and busies himself digging his satchel from the secure locker above them. He slings it across his chest and pushes open the bent tailgate doors. He drops to the grass and turns back just in time to see Hannibal crouching beside the injured guard. He peers into the guard's eyes, grips his wrist, and then presses a hand to his belly. A moment later, he takes the guard's face between his hands and snaps his neck with a vicious twist.

"He would not have survived his injuries," Hannibal says as he leaps from the van. "This is better, I think."

There are two police cruisers parked haphazardly nearby. Hannibal opens the nearest and drags the driver from the seat. Will moves to check the cab of the van, finding the driver slumped over the wheel. His face is lost to a shattering exit wound and only a shapeless mass of blood and brain and bone remains. The guard beside the driver lived long enough to climb from the cab and return fire; spent shells are scattered across the shoulder beside him. One lone shell catches the sun, a bright sparkle of copper against soaking dark blood and the sickly gray of his intestines. The air smells of death.

Will returns to Hannibal to find him still fiddling with the ignition of the police cruiser.

"It will not start," he says petulantly, pulling on an exposed wire harness. Will leans over him and pops the bonnet latch. Under the bonnet he finds the immobiliser and tracker connections and pulls both away from the ignition. He pulls a multi-tool from his pocket and disconnects then reconnects the battery.

"Put the key in and try it now," he calls to Hannibal, dropping the bonnet back into place. The engine turns over and Will opens the passenger side door. Hannibal, already in the driver's seat, pushes the body of a dead officer out at Will's feet.

"Going my way?" He asks with a sly twist of his top lip. Will spares only a single glance for the corpse at his feet, then slides in. He drops the seat almost horizontal and curls onto his side to watch Hannibal, who glances down at him with soft, fond, eyes.

"We are still two hours from the coast. You should get some rest while you can." Hannibal tells Will firmly, turning back to the road.

"Thanks," Will says sleepily. He tucks his elbow beneath his head and closes his eyes. "It's weird," he mumbles a moment later, "but I thought being with you again would be more...I don't know...momentous." He pronounces the word carefully, giving it weight.

"Do you not find this moment meaningful, Will?" Hannibal asks curiously.

“Of *course* I do.” Will hears the uncertainty just below the surface of Hannibal’s calm and it sticks in his throat. When he speaks again his words are thick and clumsy. “God, I-” he breaks off and instead reaches out to rest his hand on Hannibal’s thigh. “You.. you returned to me when I read your first letter. Every moment, every choice I’ve made since then, it’s been like you were there. I could feel you beside me, just out of sight. Heard your footsteps following me.”

“I wish that I had been,” Hannibal says quietly, dropping a hand to rest over Will’s. Will turns his palm upwards and laces their fingers together, feels Hannibal’s heartbeat in the webbing between his thumb and forefinger. He lets out the breath he has been holding and drops back against the seat, curls his fingers tight into Hannibal’s and presses his knuckles against Hannibal’s quadricep, warm beneath his hand. He closes his eyes and lets Hannibal drive them away from the wreckage.

***

It’s late afternoon when they arrive at the house on the cliffs. Will stumbles from the car with a yawn and follows Hannibal to the edge of the garden. He curls against Hannibal’s back, peering over his shoulder down to where hungrily foaming waves roil against stone.

“The bluff is eroding,” Hannibal murmurs thoughtfully. “There was more land when I was here with Abigail. More land still when I was here with Miriam Lass.”

“Now,” Will says, wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s waist and burying his face against his shoulder, “you're here with me.”

“And the bluff is still eroding. Soon all of this will be lost to the sea.” Hannibal turns in Will’s embrace and wraps his arms around Will, raises a tentative hand to his hair. When Will only clings tighter, Hannibal presses his palm to the curve of Will’s occipital bone and weaves his fingers into Will’s hair. He breathes soap and salt and blood and underneath it, the scent of stolen kisses and lazy mornings and sun on water. *Will* .

“But not us.” Hannibal whispers, leaning in to touch his lips to Will’s temple.

Will pulls back from him then, smiling a fond and lopsided smile that does nothing to disguise the deviousness beneath.

“Actually , ” he says, “that is *exactly* what I have planned for us.” He takes Hannibal by the hand and leads him deeper into the garden. They stop when they reach the low shrubs that disguise the path to the dock, and Will nudges Hannibal through. Without the protection of the garden, the cold ocean wind cuts through their clothing and stings their skin and eyes. Will uses their joined hands to point down to the dock.

The dock is already cloaked in dim evening shadow, but the craft is clearly silhouetted against the darker water. Hannibal is still for one long moment and Will knows he is seeing their design unfold as clearly as if he had in truth been by Will’s side. Will watches him and waits.

Eventually, Hannibal turns to Will. His eyes are alight and his lips are moving, shaping his pleasure and pride, but his words are snatched away by the wind. He smiles at Will's bemused expression and says nothing more but instead lifts their hands to his lips and presses a lingering kiss to Will's knuckles.

Hannibal is still holding Will's hand tight to chest when he leads them back to the house.

***

The muffled *thud* of the front door closing echoes around the tiled foyer. The cliffside symphony of wind, waves, and bird calls is suddenly silenced and for one panicked moment Will wonders if he has gone deaf. Then

" *Will* ." Hannibal breathes his name and the spell is broken; the air is filled with panting breaths and quick footsteps as Will crosses the space between them and gathers Hannibal into his arms. Will presses him against the arch that leads to the living space, their still-joined hands held over Hannibal's head. The kiss is sweet; long, soft, presses of lips like the lapping waves of a rising tide.

"I… uh," Will laughs into the warm space between their mouths, "I'm not sure what I intended here. I may need some direction."

Hannibal pulls back. His smile is slight but genuine. "The kitchen is to your right and the living area is to your left," he offers softly, inclining his head to indicate direction. "And the master bedroom is at the top of the stairs."

Will snorts and shakes his head but kisses him again, still soft but wet and open-mouthed and *hungry* . Hannibal moans and arches his back, pushing his hardening cock roughly into Will's hip. Will brings his lips to Hannibal's jaw, his neck, and his collarbones (too sharp where they rise from his white cotton t-shirt). He scrapes his teeth over the pale junction of neck and shoulder and Hannibal cries out hoarsely, "Will... *ça fait trop longtemps* …please, *please* ..." His words slur into moan when Will pulls the jumpsuit open and slips his hands beneath layers of cotton to find the skin and soft hair of chest and belly, and lower, the gathered waistband of Hannibal's shorts.

The fabric is damp where Hannibal's cock rises beneath his hand, and smells of bleach and sweat and laundry starch. In Will's memories Hannibal smells of salt and soap and clean sheets, cologne, basil and mint and champagne and *sakura* , or leather and lubricant and whiskey. The scent of Hannibal's prison has no place in their reunion.

Will pauses his exploration and brings his hands to cup Hannibal's face. He strokes the stubble at Hannibal's jaw, nuzzling against his lips and chin before kissing his mouth; a gentle, lush brush of tongue finished with a sucking bite as he pulls away.

"May I take you to bed?" He murmurs, an echo a long-ago afternoon in his kitchen in Wolf Trap.

"You may," Hannibal laughs breathlessly, gripping Will's hand to pull him towards the stairs.

***

“Uh-uh, Doctor,” Will says sternly when Hannibal maneuvers them towards the enormous bed. “You smell like the hospital and if I ever had prison fantasies, you better believe they are long gone.”

“Go on, take it all off,” he orders, stepping back and crossing his arms. Hannibal raises an amused eyebrow, then nods. He strips quickly, kicking aside his jumpsuit, t-shirt, boxers, socks, and slippers without a second glance. He strides to the sliding glass ensuite door then pauses, looking back over his shoulder at Will, who is still standing awkwardly in the centre of the room.

“I am unaccustomed now to showering alone,” Hannibal smiles at Will invitingly, “perhaps you would care to join me?”

The bathroom is creamy stone with narrow timber-framed windows that look down over miles of shadowed estuary and woodland. Hannibal seats himself on a bath stool and leans his head against Will’s belly while Will shampoos his hair, shorter now and sparkling with silver in the low light. Will sifts it through his fingers, enjoying the slight vibration of pleased humming just to the side of his navel and the rough brush of stubble against his scar. His cock is half-hard and slippery-sensitive where it rubs against Hannibal’s shoulder as he moves. He draws a sharp breath when Hannibal turns his head to mouth wetly at his shaft.

“I guess bath time’s over,” Will says hoarsely. He tilts his body slightly to allow spray to rinse the suds from Hannibal’s hair and while his eyes are closed he feels Hannibal draw the head of Will’s cock deep into his mouth; a long, hot, sucking glide that brings Will quickly to full attention.

“Not quite, I think,” Hannibal murmurs as he draws back. Will barely has time to breathe before he is once again immersed in gentle heat. For a heartstopping moment, he thinks he might come when he feels the unexpected flutter of Hannibal’s throat .

“ *Fuck, Hannibal* -” he gasps out as he opens his eyes. Hannibal is looking up at him, his dark eyes narrowed against the spray. As Will watches, he hollows his cheeks and sucks, sliding down and up and down again over Will’s cock before pulling back to circle the head with hot tongue and a flash of sharp, crooked teeth. Will groans, a pained sound that spurs Hannibal to move faster, tongue rasping against the underside of Will’s shaft as he sucks and slips.

Will’s hands fall to Hannibal’s shoulders, where his nails cut wet, red, crescent moons into the smooth flesh. Blood rises around his fingertips and is carried away by steaming water.

“Hannibal,” he says sharply, panicked and breathless, “I’m gonna-”

Hannibal only hums and continues to move steadily. His hands stroke Will’s ass, trace the cleft of his buttocks. He pushes into Will gently with the tip of one finger and Will comes with a choked moan, curling his body over Hannibal and crying out his release over and over until his breath comes in whimpering pants.

When Will's breathing slows, Hannibal stands.

"My darling boy," he sighs, drawing Will's head to his shoulder. They stand entwined and still until Will's skin starts to chill under Hannibal's hands. Then, he lowers Will to the bath stool and directs the spray to cover him, watching the flush rise on his chest and back as his body warms.

Will lets his mind drift while Hannibal washes him, rinsing away the lingering traces of blood and sweat and cordite from his hair and body.

Away from the shower, Hannibal wraps Will in a plush white towel. He wrings the water from his hair with a small soft cloth, rubs him dry with the towel, then tosses both aside and steers Will to the bedroom.

"I missed you." Will says when they are lying face to face in the bed, curved toward each other like parentheses under the sheets. "I'd say you can't understand how much, but I think you might be the only one who can."

"When I heard of your marriage," Hannibal begins, and Will tenses but doesn't interrupt, "I thought I might never see you again."

"Come on!" Will exclaims more loudly than he intends, "that letter clearly wasn't your goodbye. You knew-"

"I *hoped,* " Hannibal corrects gently, drawing Will's hands up to cover his heart. "I could never entirely predict you, Will." He reaches out to pull Will closer, kissing his neck to taste the flutter of his pulse beneath thin skin. Will sighs and lets his head fall to the side, closing his eyes against the last rays of the sun, red and fierce and sinking fast into the clouded horizon.

Hannibal pushes Will's hands into the sheets and with a twist of his hips, rolls them until he is covering Will, every inch of their bodies pressed tightly together. Will opens his eyes to see Hannibal above him, dark eyes glimmering red and gold in the dying light.

" *Mon bijou,* " he sighs, and drops his head again to Will's neck. Will lets his eyes close, soaking in Hannibal's scent and the heaviness of him, like gravity, pushing Will into the sheets.

Hannibal whispers into Will's skin as he strings tiny kisses from neck to shoulder, chest to throat, "My treasure, my own." He sinks his cock between Will's thighs and groans Will's name. They roll together like the ocean waves as Hannibal thrusts over and over into the slick space behind Will's balls, breath coming fast and mixed with fragments of endearments and promises. Will swallows panting breaths and oaths alike, feeling them crowding his belly and pressing on his lungs. He's dizzy with love, breathless with wanting and *having* .

When Hannibal comes it's scalding; salty and hot and too much on Will's chafed and delicate skin. He cries out and clutches Will's hands while his hips move helplessly, spreading slick heat across Will's cock and the sensitive skin around his scar. They breathe together, nose to nose, sharing damp air.

It's a long time before Hannibal rolls off to lie on his back in the sheets.

"I never did bury you completely, you know." Will says quietly. "How could I? Every breath I took tasted like you. If I… If I closed my eyes when I was with Molly, you were waiting behind my eyelids."

Hannibal drew in a sharp breath. "You told me that you no longer wished to think of me."

"I didn't." The words are bitter in Will's mouth. "Not at first, anyway."

"And then?" Hannibal asks cooly. "What changed?"

"Nothing." Will replies simply. "At least, nothing real." He pauses, tapping his fingers against the sheet. "Just my understanding." *Just my whole fucking view of the universe* .

"The man I thought I ought to be, the man that I thought I could be, he belonged there with his family. The man I am, what I *really* am, and what I could become," he says, propping himself up on an elbow to look down at Hannibal, "could only ever belong with you." *And ain't that a kick in the head* .

"I tried to tell you." Hannibal says, faintly smug. He surges up to kiss Will then, sweetly and slowly, ending with a sharp scrape of teeth on his bottom lip.

"I know." Will says softly when they part, thinking of two golden rings hidden away in Hannibal's safe. Two golden rings in Will's jeans pocket on the bathroom floor.

Wills stomach growls, derailing his train of thought and reminding him of the time. Hannibal smiles and says, "I think we've only just whetted your appetite, Will. It is unfortunate that our guest is soon expected."

Will chuckles awkwardly, discomforted by the reminder of Francis Dolarhyde's impending arrival. "I really have missed your cooking, you know."

"There may not be time for a feast such as I would desire," Hannibal offers apologetically, "but I would be pleased to prepare a meal."

"Not lamb." says Will.

"No," agrees Hannibal, "not lamb."

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

> “It wasn’t surprising that I heard from the Great Red Dragon. Was it surprising when you heard from him?”
>
> Will considers for a moment. “Yes and no.”
>
> Hannibal hums thoughtfully. “It will help me to know,” he hesitates a moment and takes Will’s jaw between his fingers, tipping Will’s face back to meet his eyes before continuing. “Do you intend to kill him?”
>
> “I intend to *change* him.” Will retorts, and pulls away from Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

> I have been carrying a huge weight of guilt and anxiety over not finishing this piece, and I have no words to express the relief I feel at finally posting. Thank you to those beautiful folk still following and commenting. One day, as a reward for us all, I might actually edit it for continuity and re-examine some canon elements that I have definitely hand-waved. For today, though, please enjoy the concluding chapter of my magnum opus.
>
> Some dialogue and story elements from Hannibal episode 3X13, bent slightly to fit my canon-divergent requirements.
>
> Title from *A Love Letter To Her Husband* by Anne Bradstreet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I don’t think I’d be good company.” Will says with something less like a smile than an unpracticed stretch of his lips. He puts the wine on the butchers’ block out of range of Hannibal’s elbows and retreats to the shadows at the edge of the kitchen.

“I disagree,” Hannibal says smoothly, pressing the lid of the centrifuge in place. It hums to life and he looks up to notice Will’s awkward position by the door. His brow creases; just a flicker of disappointment before he smiles and nods in acknowledgement. “But before you go, what came of Mister Silvestri’s donor?”

"You, uh, saved his life." Will's smile is genuine now, warm and pleased. Hannibal's heart stutters and he draws a sharp, surprised breath, unnoticed by Will in his rush to leave. Hannibal is relieved he can pretend the colour that comes to his cheeks is a modest blush.

"It's been a long time since I used a scalpel on anything but a pencil."

Will is silent for so long Hannibal expects him to leave without speaking. Eventually, when Hannibal's attention is focussed on mixing plasma into glaze, Will asks "Why did you stop being a surgeon?"

Hannibal looks up thoughtfully, as if reflecting. Finally, he responds "I killed someone." Actually, he'd killed a great many someones, but that was neither here nor there. Will's expression is curiously blank, and then, just curious.

"More accurately," Hannibal continues in a milder tone, "I couldn't save someone. But it felt like killing them." Will's understanding gaze is soft and sweet and very, very, blue. Silence stretches between them, but eventually Will drops his eyes and turns to go.

"I should go," he says with just a twist of his lips. "I've got a date with the Chesapeake Ripper."

***

Will watches Hannibal open the wine, slitting the seal with a sharp blade and then spearing the cork. The point flashes in the low light and he feels a phantom flash of searing hot pain in his belly, smells rain and blood and Hannibal's cologne. His heart pounds and for one agonizing moment he thinks he might cry.

"Will?" Hannibal comes to his side, puts an arm around his waist, and draws him close. The remembered scent of cologne fades, replaced by soap and sweat and wool. Will breathes deeply and underneath finds the distant, salt-sweet memory of sex and skin. He takes a glass from Hannibal's other hand and sips slowly, waiting for his heart to slow. Leaning closer, Will guides Hannibal's left hand to his waist also and rests back against his chest, letting him feel the shape of the weapon at his back. Their joined hands cover Will's scar.

"I'm okay," Will sighs, and he is more or less sure it is true.

"It's okay to not be okay, Will." Hannibal says.

"Doctor Lecter," Will growls warningly, "your therapist is showing." He feels Hannibal's smile as a brief press of stubbled cheek against his temple. When he speaks, his voice reverberates through Will's throat as if the words were Will's own.

"It wasn't surprising that I heard from the Great Red Dragon. Was it surprising when you heard from him?"

Will considers for a moment. "Yes and no."

Hannibal hums thoughtfully. "It will help me to know," he hesitates a moment and takes Will's jaw between his fingers, tipping Will's face back to meet his eyes before continuing.

“Do you intend to kill him?”

“I intend to *change* him.” Will retorts, and pulls away from Hannibal. He sets his glass down on the piano and, avoiding Hannibal’s enquiring gaze, reaches into his inside pocket for the velvet pouch.

“I don’t-” Will starts awkwardly, then trails off when he sees Hannibal’s eyes widen. The sound of the window cracking registers a moment later, and the glass falls to the floor just as Hannibal does. Will catches him awkwardly and lowers him to the ground, one hand already pressed to Hannibal’s over the spreading dark stain on his sweater.

Will shrugs out of his jacket and tucks it beneath Hannibal’s head. His knees are warm and damp where his wool trousers are soaking up Hannibal’s blood and Hannibal’s hand is cool under his, pushed hard against the wound in his gut.

“It seems our guest has arrived,” Hannibal says archly. They both turn to watch Francis Dolarhyde striding across the sparkling remains of the window. Glass crunches beneath his boots and all else is silence.

“Don’t run. I’ll catch you.” The Great Red Dragon warns Will as Will stands to face him. Will nods.

“Hello, Francis.” Hannibal is as polite and calm as if he were welcoming Francis Dolarhyde into his office. Will wonders if he is even aware of the pain.

“Hello Doctor Lecter.” Francis says distractedly as he unpacks his camera and tripod. He motions to Will with the muzzle of his gun and Will moves to his side and, sighing, sets up the equipment.

Fucking drama queen , he thinks agitatedly as he screws the camera down to the tripod.

“I'm going to film your death, Dr.Lecter,” Francis says mildly, “as dying, you meld with the strength of the Dragon.”

Hannibal looks thoughtful. “It's a glorious and rather discomfiting idea.”

Will takes a step back as the Dragon descends on Hannibal. He slowly reaches for his gun, tightening his fingers around the grip while the Dragon is distracted by his prey. He slides the safety off, preparing to draw-

The knife is cold, stinging pain and an electrifying screaming of nerves. It pierces his cheek, slicing his tongue and gums and jarring his teeth. His mouth fills with blood and he gags. Arms like steel encircle his chest and upper arms hoist him up when his knees buckle. The Dragon uses his shoulder to drive the blade deeper into Will’s face. The blood runs down Will’s throat and he chokes, flinching when bile burns his torn flesh.

The Dragon swings Will around and tosses him through the broken window as if he weighs no more than a child. Will lands hard on the stone patio, winded and breathless, glass

pricking his palms. He sucks in one laboured, aching, breath,and then another. He rolls onto his back and brushes the glass from his face. With a growl, he gains his feet.

“It'll be easy to break your back,” the Dragon calls to Will as he crosses the patio. “Better than killing you. Break your back and twist it, just to be sure. They'll have to roll you to your next investigation.”

Will smiles grimly at the thought of himself masked and strapped down like Mason Verger. He is distantly aware that the smile hurts, that he should be screaming with the hurt. It seems somehow unimportant. He draws his gun, finally, and feels Beverley’s ghostly touch on his shoulder as he settles into a firing stance.

The Dragon rips the gun from Will’s fingers and hurls it into the dark. He grabs Will by the shoulders and twists him, trying to find purchase to fulfill his promise but his hands are slick with blood and sweat and Will shimmies to the side. With a grunt, Will tugs the knife from his cheek and thrusts it deep into the Dragon’s thigh. One strong arm slips away and Will throws his weight toward the ground.

He sees the bright flash of the knife above him just a heartbeat before the Dragon plunges it into the knot of scar tissue in his right shoulder. The pain is sudden and paralysing; Will’s arm dangles uselessly by his side, helpless to stop the hand that grasps the knife handle and lifts him off his feet. He feels a wrenching pull in his cervical spine and braces for the snap.

When Will drops he thinks for a moment that the Dragon *has* broken his back. He lands in an awkward crouch and realises the Dragon has been drawn from his attack. Will looks up to see Hannibal clinging to the Dragon’s back with his knees dug in beneath the ribs and his bloody hands wrapped about the skull, fighting for the leverage he needs to snap the Dragon’s spine. His eyes are all pupil; black and fierce and *alive* . Will has never seen anything more beautiful.

After a brief struggle, the Dragon hurls Hannibal to the ground. He rolls gracelessly across the stones and fetches up in the shadows near a neatly stacked pile of firewood. The Dragon watches Hannibal’s still form with quiet satisfaction then glances toward the house. Will thinks perhaps he is checking on the camera.

Bracing himself, Will pulls the knife from his shoulder. Blood soaks his sleeve and drips between his fingers, a gentle tickling sensation that bothers Will more than the knife wound. Will runs towards the Dragon. He plants the knife into the Dragon’s back, dancing away as the Dragon turns. In the shadows, Will sees Hannibal getting to his feet. In his hand is the hatchet Will had used to split the logs for their fire.

Will's face is hot with pain, but he bares his teeth in another grim and aching smile. The Dragon stops for a moment and, too late, spins around to face Hannibal who drops clumsily to one knee and swings the hatchet at the Dragon’s legs, severing his Achilles tendon and then burying the rusted edge deep into his gastrocnemius. Will attacks from the front in a flurry of stabs and slashes. Blood runs down the Dragon’s legs in shining streams and pools on the stones, dark as garnets in the dim light.

A deep growling cry cuts across the background noise of waves and wet, laboured breaths. Hannibal appears above the Dragon, haloed silver and eldritch in the moonlight. Will watches him for a moment, breathless. When their eyes meet, Will sticks his knife into the Dragon's gut. He bares his teeth and drags the blade from hip to hip but he doesn't watch for the darkly glistening tumble of entrails; he only watches Hannibal.

With a feral, elated grin, Hannibal draws back his head like a snake and strikes, ripping out the Dragon's throat. As the Dragon falls, Hannibal drops to sit beside Will where is curled up on a clean patch of stone. The raw remains of the Dragon's throat glisten in the moonlight, black rivers of blood flowing from a terrible spring.

Hannibal's mouth is dark, wet with blood. His teeth are sharp and bright.

"I saw this," Will rasps. Hannibal turns to him slowly, blinking away the blood that trickles from a deep gash above his ear. "I saw what Dolarhyde saw when he killed those families; their blood on his hands, his chest, how it looked under the full moon."

Will holds up a bloodied hand, turns it over. "It really does look black in the moonlight."

"See," Hannibal whispers, his voice hoarse and thick. "This is all I ever wanted for you, Will. For both of us." He caresses Will's face with gentle fingers, smearing cooling blood down his jaw.

"It's beautiful." Will slurs out. The pain in his face and shoulder are bright and terrible and bearing down on him like a train but before he falls beneath the wheels, he lets Hannibal kiss him. The taste of his own blood mingles with the Dragon's on Hannibal's tongue.

Melded with our strength , Will thinks as he drifts away.

***

Will wakes to pain and fading afternoon sunlight.

His face, teeth and tongue are throbbing, with sharp red pulses where the Dragon's knife cut deepest. His shoulder and thigh feel hot and swollen, livid splashes of pain against his canvas of aches and strains and bruises. He manages to hobble to the head and when he returns, Hannibal is placing a cup of coffee and what looks like a bowl of soup on his nightstand.

The remaining Percocets are gone, but once Will has swallowed a few painful sips of lukewarm soup, Hannibal places one on his tray with two Advil and Will takes them obediently before finishing his soup. When Will attempts to stand, Hannibal pushes him gently back against the pillows and produces a syringe fitted with a long needle. "Cefotetan," he says in answer to Will's questioning look. "To prevent infection." Hannibal's accent is thick and somehow awkward, as if his tongue is unfamiliar with the shape of the words. Painkillers, Will realises. Strong ones.

Hannibal's hands are warm and gentle on Will's thigh and the needle is less than a moment's discomfort compared to the insistent agony of his injuries. Hannibal frowns when he checks

the sutures on Will's other leg, and yet again more deeply when he examines Will's shoulder.

"Perhaps it is too late for prophylaxis," he murmurs, running a finger along Will's collar bone. Will bites back a scream. Hannibal cocks his head, then offers Will another Percocet. "You will tell me if it gets worse," he says, taking the water from Will and unfolding a sling strap he has produced seemingly from nowhere. Will nods, and breathes through the pain of fitting the sling. When it is done, the strain on his shoulder has eased and the painkillers are starting to work. He leans forward to rest his head against Hannibal's chest, pressing his ear tight against his sweater to hear his heartbeat. Hannibal rests a hand in his hair.

After a moment, Will looks up. Without breaking eye contact, he nudges meaningfully at the bandages around Hannibal's middle, and runs a finger up under his sweater to trace the edges of the gauze pad covering the gunshot wound.

"It is only flesh and muscle. My organs appear undamaged." Will lets his insistent worry show in his eyes and pokes a finger into Hannibal's sternum to make the point.

"I will recover, Will," he says firmly, taking Will's hand between both of his own, "*et ce sera comme un rêve*."

Will pats the bed beside him and Hannibal sits, arranging himself carefully against the pillows and placing a hand on Will's knee, carefully avoiding his injuries. They sip coffee in silence and watch the sun slip toward the horizon. When their cups are empty, they curl into each other and exchange gentle, dreamy, kisses in the gathering darkness.

Will pulls away when his face starts to ache, resting his forehead against Hannibal's and his good hand over Hannibal's heart. When he speaks, his tongue feels thick and numb.

"I don't know where we're going."

"Are you uncertain of the destination, or of the journey itself?" Hannibal's words are barely more than a whisper of warm air against Will's undamaged cheek but Will feels them like a weight.

Are you uncertain of me?

"Just uncertain about sailing off into the night with a head full of Percocet." Hannibal breathes a laugh against Will's ear.

"Chiyo will set a course for a safe harbour; literally and figuratively. All you need do is follow it, and I will be by your side."

"Literally or figuratively?"

"I find myself reluctant to be parted from you just now," Hannibal says, standing slowly and reaching for Will's clothes. "I will accompany you back to the deck."

"Thanks," is all Will can say as they work to dress Will in his discarded pants and a clean pullover. They stay pressed close together as they ascend the stairs to the upper deck, a

weighted silence between them.

***

Chiyo is at the wheel, an insulated mug in her hand.

"The course is set." She says to Will as she passes. "I suggest not entering any well-travelled passages until darkness has fallen."

She leaves them alone on the deck with a thermos of broth and a firm warning to use the internal phone if they need her help. Hannibal wraps Will carefully with a soft warm blanket in place of a coat and then settles in beside him. Will turns on the radio and slowly scans the bands, stopping now and again to listen to Coast Guard bulletins, weather messages, and the easy chatter of freighter pilots and fishermen.

Hannibal watches Will's hand on the controls.

"I left it behind." Will murmurs, flexing his shaking fingers to display the space where his wedding band had been. Slowly, he reaches down and draws the pouch from his pocket. He places it into Hannibal's palm, folding his fingers around it and for a moment, they share the weight of the gold between them.

He waits breathlessly while Hannibal stares down at his clenched fist. When Hannibal finally meets Will's eyes, his gaze is steady.

"My dearest Will," he says quietly. "Have you returned to me?"

Will's heart thuds painfully; eight, nine, ten heavy beats before he can breathe and it resumes in a light, rapid rhythm that is closer to desire than fear. He feels dizzy.

"Do you need to ask?"

"You crossed the ocean for me once before, only to close the door to your heart when we came ashore." There is no anger in Hannibal's voice, just a sort of weary regret.

Will tightens his grip on Hannibal's hand. "I am yours. I always was. The most essential parts of myself were lost to me when we were separated. I wasn't really me without you." Hannibal's breathing is unsteady and his eyes are dark and wet, but Will's started talking now and won't stop until he is done. "I returned to myself through your letters, just like you said."

He doesn't say *I never loved her* , because it isn't true. It's just that the man who loved Molly was never really Will.

"My darling boy," Hannibal whispers, and leans forward to turn the warm space between them into a kiss. It's not much, just a press of torn and chapped lips, but Will feels it all the way down to his toes.

"You said in your first letter," Will murmurs when they separate, "that the ideal model for marriage is after a short courtship. In your scientific opinion, Doctor Lecter, does that doom

us to a life of mediocrity?"

"I would consider that our pair bond was formed quite some time ago. But I would not be opposed," Hannibal replies with a slightly off-centre smirk, "to a second honeymoon."

Will kisses him again and again, softly sweet and then more urgently; sucking at Hannibal's tongue and lips until the salty tang of the soup is gone and he tastes only of blood and heat. Hannibal's hands slip from Will's hair to his neck, then move lightly over his injured chest before coming to rest high on Will's thighs, and although he's exhausted and slightly stoned from the Percocet, Will is surprised to find himself getting hard. Hannibal makes a small, pleased sound and wriggles his fingers closer until his palm covers Will's fly.

"I don't know if I can-" Will starts awkwardly.

"We shall see, won't we?" Hannibal says in a low voice, tracing the shape of Will's cock through his jeans. Will groans and leans his face into Hannibal's neck.

Hannibal is careful to keep the rug over Will's lap as he opens his fly and draws his erection up and out. He strokes it gently, his palms rough with grazes and years without soft soaps and creams. Will groans again, loud and gutteral. Hannibal's hand twists over the head of his cock and the dry friction makes Will flinch. Hannibal withdraws his hand and before Will can speak he brings it to his mouth and licks his palm, letting saliva drip from his tongue to his skin. The moisture glistens obscenely in the light from the controls.

"Hannibal," Will breathes. Then, because his mind has gone blank of anything else, "fuck, please, just do it."

The first damp slide of Hannibal's fingers is torturously slow; hot and wet and so good Will feels like he might cry.

"I can't wait to show you Paris, darling," Hannibal murmurs against his ear. "To lie in bed and feed you rare delicacies from my fingers and then take you to our balcony and fuck you while we look down at the crowds on the riverbank."

Will's breath comes in hard, painful gasps that jar his bruised ribs, but he groans again just to feel the ache there, "Yes, anything,"

"In Autumn," Hannibal continues as he slides his thumb over the now slick tip of Will's cock. "There will be a cool breeze, a perfect foil for the unbearable heat inside you. Just enough," he says thoughtfully, squeezing as he strokes, purposefully speeding Will towards his orgasm, "to keep me poised on the very edge, to keep me hard while you writhe against me and take your pleasure."

" *Hannibal*- " Will croaks out, biting into his lip as he comes. Hannibal growls, lunging lightning-quick to lick at the welling blood. Will's frantic panting becomes a keening moan when stinging pain overlays the aching pleasure of his climax. Will feels Hannibal shudder, hears his choked moan as his shoulders tense and Will knows without seeing that Hannibal is touching himself. He turns his head into Hannibal's neck and scrapes his teeth across one of the dark bruises that blooms above the collar of his coat, at the same time reaching under the

rug with his good hand to touch the hair at the base of Hannibal's cock and stroke his balls where they pull tight against his body. Hannibal cries out wordlessly as his muscles tense and his neck arches against Will's mouth. Will tastes salt and sweat and feels the tell-tale flex and pulse of Hannibal's orgasm against the back of his hand.

Afterwards, they huddle together in the pile of rugs. The night is cold enough that their mingled breaths smoke between them, but their bodies are warm and eventually Will finds himself dozing, lulled into sleep by the sounds of the ocean and Hannibal's breathing.

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For weeks they crawl down the coast, watching the stars and the navigation by night and sleeping by day under Chiyo's watchful guard. When they reach Savannah, Will goes ashore in the early evening with a new haircut and a sweetly southern accent to buy wine and fruit and a weather-appropriate wardrobe. He returns with bags of starched shorts, designer polo shirts in pastel colours, leather deck shoes, and enough lubricant to waterproof the hull.

"If you are bored," Chiyo says mildly when he exits the *adult boutique* , "you should focus on your physiotherapy."

"Bless your heart, honey," Will croons loudly, "don't I just plan to."

Hannibal laughs when Will tells him of it. His smile, when he holds Will's hips as they kneel together in rocky shallows and whispers *push back against me* and *arms above your head, Mr Graham* , is wide and joyful.

***

They drop anchor just off Cay Biscayne. Chiyo hangs a sheet up in the galley and takes headshots of Will and Hannibal with her phone, positioning them just so to imitate the flat, overexposed light of a passport picture. Will watches the dinghy speed away from the wide windows in the dining area and tries not to panic. He breathes and counts *in for four, hold for seven, out for eight* , over and over until his clutching stomach relaxes and he can finally swallow down the acid taste of his worry.

Hannibal wakes after midday and, with a long look at Will's shadowed eyes and trembling hands, goes straight to the galley. In a miraculously short time, or so it seems to Will, he is presented with coffee, crepes, and grilled pineapple that smells of chilli and brown sugar.

"Eat," Hannibal says firmly. "She will return."

Will eats, and then, despite two cups of coffee, he sleeps. When he awakens it is to the sound of Chiyo and Hannibal's hushed voices; French and English and Japanese rolling together in the unique music that belongs only to their private conversations. He rolls over to watch the water and lets the rise and fall of their words soothe him back to sleep.

It is full dark when Will wakes again to find Hannibal seated on the bed beside him. He has overslept by hours, and wonders at first why no one woke him to take his place at the wheel.

“What time is it?” He asks groggily, swallowing to clear the taste of sleep from his mouth.

“It is after midnight,” Hannibal replies calmly, as if this is not at all an aberrance from their daily routine. “I made coffee.” He adds, waiting until Will has struggled to a sitting position before handing him the mug. It’s strong and sweet with sugar and orange peel and dark rum.

“Boozy coffee and a sleep in?” asks Will when he has taken a large swallow. “If I were a suspicious man, I might think you were softening me up for bad news.” It’s only barely a joke.

“If you were a suspicious man,” Hannibal says dryly, “you might have thought twice about letting a cannibal fellate you.”

The rum is warming Will’s belly. He chuckles, and with a shrug says “I didn’t know you were a cannibal the first time. Even if I had, I *still* would have been more worried about the fact you were a psychiatrist.”

“And so you decided that it was prudent to keep my mouth occupied to prevent analytical ambush?” Hannibal asks with a raised eyebrow. He rises from the bed, dropping a pair of shorts in Will’s lap. “You may be assured that I have no plans for an impromptu session this morning, but there are things we must discuss.” He says, opening the door to leave. “Please join us as soon as you are ready.”

***

When the sun rises, Will and Chiyo are already queued for security screening at Miami airport. Will is tired and hollow-eyed but clean shaven, wearing a pair of Hannibal’s shorts that hang loose from his hips and an FSU hoodie. He carries his leather satchel and a duffel bag. Chiyo follows him, a hiking pack slung over one shoulder and a purse shaped like Minnie Mouse hanging from the other on a long chain strap. She is wearing a short denim dress and plastic shoes.

Will is surprised when they pass through without so much as a second glance from the guards. He collects his new wallet, phone and tablet in their battered cases from the scanning belt and waits for Chiyo to pass through the metal detector. For once, he hopes she is unarmed.

They buy Starbucks coffee and drink it holding hands on their walk through the terminal. When they reach customs, Will starts to worry. Chiyo stands close with her hand around his waist.

“Look around you,” she says softly into his ear. To anyone watching it would seem tender, intimate. “There is nothing about us that draws the eye.”

“I wish he was here,” Will murmurs down to her, and there is no question who *he* is.

“He is safer this way. We all are.” Chiyo replies, and Will does not disagree. But he does fear.

The TSA agent glances disinterestedly at his coach-class ticket to Montego Bay then flips through his passport. Her ID badge says 'Sarah' and hanging silver charms click together at her tanned wrist as she turns the cover; block letters, M-O-M. Her eyes are on his cheek, his jaw.

"What happened to your face, son?" Her accent is local, husky, although there is no smell of tobacco.

Will doesn't need to playact his discomfort. He looks down at the doctored, scar-free and youthful image of himself in miniature on the passport. "Motor vehicle accident, ma'am," he mumbles in his best boatyard twang. "My buddy was drunk," he adds, looking up at her from under his tousled bangs. She sighs.

"I always tell my boys 'don't you dare get in the car, you just call me'," she says. "I hope you got someone to call next time, honey." Will nods, and then, because she seems to expect it, adds another mumbled "yes ma'am.". Sarah smiles at him then asks him to confirm his full name and date of birth. David Broussard was born in Shreveport in December 1992, an embarrassing twelve years later than Will, but he's always looked younger without his beard.

He strides off into the terminal without looking back at Chiyo and as soon as he's out of the TSA area he slips into a men's room. He changes hurriedly in the privacy of a cubicle; olive suit pants, tight t-shirt and loafers. He rolls up the college kid disguise and shoves it into his duffle bag, then combs back his hair and slips on a pair of aviators before emerging to wash his hands.

Chiyo is waiting for him in the first-class lounge. She is dressed in a sleek black pantsuit and nursing a cup of green tea. Her hair is pulled back into a neat twist and the Minnie Mouse purse is nowhere to be seen. There is a glass of whiskey waiting on the table next to her and a sleek leather overnight bag under the empty chair.

"Thanks, darling. Sorry I was gone awhile." Will chirps out by way of a greeting. The passport, credit cards and first-class boarding pass in his new bag belong to a British citizen and Will does his best to rise to the occasion. He pushes his sunglasses up on his head and gives Chiyo a quick kiss on the cheek before he picks up his drink. "That's better," he says after a swallow. "That American wine does give one a bit of a fucking hangover."

"Thank God we will be home soon," Chiyo sighs, and Will hears for the first time the blurred burr of Hannibal's accent overlay her usually precise English. "What time does the flight leave?"

"I don't know," Will grumbles, digging out a leather travel folio from the bag beneath his chair. "What fucking time is it now?"

"Owen," Chiyo chides, "did you leave your watch in the hotel?"

"No I fucking did not," Will spits out, still pretending to search for it in his bag. "It's here fucking *somewhere* ." He looks up when a watch appears next to his elbow, a sleek silver chronograph that he remembers seeing on Hannibal's wrist; most recently by his own head as Hannibal fucked him. Will's legs had been wrapped around his waist, his scarred cheek

pressed to the pillow as Hannibal bit into his shoulder. The bruise still aches a little when he shoulders his new bag and kisses Chiyo again on the cheek, this time in farewell.

Owen Williams is travelling alone. He boards with an online check-in voucher and stashes his bags neatly in the overhead locker and buckles his seatbelt when instructed. He peers out of the window and watches the water around the Cays for a yacht piloted by a man Owen has never met. By the time he sees him again, Owen will be gone.

The PA crackles to life as they turn away from the coast. *This is your captain speaking. We're looking good for a smooth ride this morning, with an estimated airtime of just over an hour. The weather in Havana is a balmy eighty degrees with clear skies and sunshine. Hang on, folks, we'll be there soon.*

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My Darling Will,

Even if we were to live forever, I believe that no memory could become dearer to me than that of arriving at Santa Marta. I am still sorry to have frightened you so, but I had not accounted for a lack of cellular coverage and by the time I made port I preferred to invest my time in coming home to you rather than in trying to purchase a new phone.

You were breathtaking, nearly naked but so fiercely determined to defend yourself against my intrusion. I have always loved the sight of you holding a blade.

I would not have blamed you if you had chosen to hurt me, to punish me for the worry and grief you had suffered during my silence. I do not think that I am wrong when I say that you considered it, even if only briefly. I would have welcomed your touch either way but thankfully for my zygomatic arches, on this occasion you chose kisses rather than blows.

You had been eating grilled pineapple, just as I had made it for you those days we were at sea. Your tongue tasted of chili and it stung the skin of my jaw and neck when you kissed there.

Only a moment before I opened the door I had thought myself too exhausted to make love but the smell of you after so long… oh my love, I felt clumsy with desire, so inflamed by the feel of your mouth on mine and the hard press of your cock under my fingers that I couldn't manage the fastenings keeping us apart.

You laughed, and undressed us both. You led me to the master bathroom and washed me under the cool water. Your skin was still so hot where our bodies pressed together.

The heat inside you was greater still when you pushed me down onto our bed and sat astride me. Your eyes were so blue in the light from the window and you looked at me like you couldn't quite believe I was real.

" You are here, aren't you? *" you asked me as your eyes slipped closed. I don't think I replied; I know I called your name when you started to move over me and again when my*

pleasure came. All else was the music of our moans and gasps and the whispered obscenities of skin on skin.

It was that later that same night that we drank rum in the garden and I offered you your ring. I can never tell you quite how it felt when you let me place it on your finger, knowing that no other would ever do the same again. If I could not be the only, I am content to be the last.

By the time you wake I will be gone, but I promise faithfully that I have checked the coverage map and you will be able to reach me at any time. I will be home on Friday and, as always, I look forward to your welcome.

All my love,

Hannibal

Chapter End Notes

That's it for now, folks. Thanks for sticking it out. I had planned some time stamps for this, but I've been living in the world so long that it might be a while before I revisit it.

I am not American, so please excuse any procedural discrepancies in the matter of air travel. The passenger 'shell game' that Chiyo and Will play might not be completely believable but it was fun to write so I left it in. Anything else that looks dodgy is down to either accidental or deliberate ignorance and was convenient to create the scenes I wanted to build between our lovers. I hope you enjoyed it.

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